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# BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No 23

THE LOST LODE  
or The Boy Partners  
of Diamond Bar



BY  
CORNELIUS SHEA

Race seized a revolver from the belt of the nearest man to him, and bounded forward to the girl's assistance.



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## THE LOST LODE;

OR,

## The Boy Partners of Diamond Bar.

By CORNELIUS SHEA.

### CHAPTER I.

#### RACE'S ARRIVAL IN ARIZONA.

"Well, so you have got here at last?"

"Yes, Merle, and I am awful glad of it."

"You are not a bit more glad than I am, Race, old fellow."

The speakers were two boys, aged about seventeen or eighteen. One was attired in a stylishly-cut, neat-fitting suit of black, and the other wore a flannel shirt, corduroy trousers, high top boots and broad-brimmed felt hat.

The former was Race Neville, of New York City, and the latter was his cousin, Merle Baxter, of Glendale, Arizona.

Race had received repeated invitations to pay a visit to his cousin's Western home, but it was not until after his widowed mother died that he thought seriously of going out there.

One day he received a letter from Merle almost entreating him to come out, and the boy concluded to do so.

He was alone in the world now, as far as parents or brothers and sisters went, and what mattered it to what part of the world he went?

On the twelfth day of April, 1879, Race got aboard the cars at the Grand Central Depot, New York City, and started on his journey to the wilds of Arizona.

"Don't mind anything you hear or see," said Merle when he met Race at the Glendale station. "As soon as we get over to the house you can get out of that rig and get into one I have prepared especially for you."

"They don't seem to dress up much out here," observed Race, with a smile.

"No," was the retort. "A fellow came here one day last week wearing a swallow-tail coat and high silk hat. They shot his hat full of holes and cut the tails off his coat—that is, a crowd of half-drunken miners did."

When he had donned the suit of clothes that his cousin insisted he should wear Race looked altogether different.

Like nine out of ten of the inhabitants of the mining town, he was supplied with a brace of revolvers, the calibers of which were so large that they were anything but toys.

He hardly thought it necessary to carry these about, but Merle told him it was, so he gave in.

Shortly after darkness set in Merle suggested that they should take a walk about town to see the sights.

Race readily consented, as he was anxious to become acquainted with the manners and customs of the people.

The New York boy's face, being so pale from being so much indoors, attracted no little attention, and several of the rougher element of the men frequently alluded to it in a sarcastic way.

Race did not like this, but he wisely held his temper, though his cousin advised them more than once to desist.

When they had passed through the entire town they sat down on a grassy bank to have a talk.

Just as they did so they were startled by a groan.

It came from a gully close at hand, and instantly the boys were all attention.

Again they heard it, and, locating it, they hastened to the spot.

Neither was surprised when they found a man lying on the ground in a pool of blood.



That he was wounded unto death was plainly evident, for he was breathing heavily, and when Merle lighted a match and held it close to his face they saw that his eyes were glassy.

"What has happened, friend?" asked Race, anxiously.

The dying man, realizing that some one had come to his assistance, rallied a trifle.

"I've—I've been mur—murdered!" he gasped; "and the silver lode of Diamond Bar is—lost forever. It is worth millions, and I—I—I—am the only one who knows where it is!"

Merle quickly felt in the man's pockets and found a flask.

It contained liquor, and while his cousin held the poor fellow's head he uncorked it and placed it to his lips.

A few drops of the fiery stuff revived him somewhat, and in a voice that was between a gasp and a whisper, he went on:

"I'll tell you where the lode is, though I received my death wound because I would not tell Daring Dave, the outlaw. It—it is located seventy-six yards from the peak of Jarvis Mountain. When the sun is four hours o-o-old it—it casts a shadow upon—"

The dying man suddenly ceased. A convulsive tremor shook his frame, and then he fell back dead.

Race and Merle gazed blankly at each other, but for the space of a minute neither spoke a word.

"He is dead!" the boy from the East finally ventured.

"Yes," replied Merle.

"And he failed to tell us what he intended to."

"Yes."

"However, the words he did say are firmly stamped on my mind."

"The same here, Race."

"Where is Diamond Bar, Merle?"

The boy asked his cousin the question as he arose and stepped away from the corpse.

"About, fifty miles from here—in the wildest part of all Arizona."

"I should like to go there," said Race, half to himself.

"So should I!" exclaimed Merle. "By Jove! we will, too!"

"Would your father allow you to?"

Merle laughed.

"Would he? Why, he has not been afraid to trust me anywhere since I entered my fourteenth year!"

"We will go, then, and hunt for the lost lode of silver," observed the New York boy in a decisive tone. "But what are we going to do about this poor dead fellow?"

"We will simply go into town and report that we heard a groan and found him dying. It is unnecessary to state what he said," retorted Merle.

"We ought to mention that he said Daring Dave, the outlaw, gave him his death wound."

"That is so; I forgot about that."

"Well, come on, then."

Climbing a slight hill, the pair reached the roadside and hastened to make their report.

## CHAPTER II.

### RACE SHOWS HIS NERVE.

"Have something, gentlemen!"

The speaker stood near the bar of the principal hotel in Glendale. He was a man of medium stature, rather dark-complexioned, but decidedly good-looking.

He was not over thirty-five, but might have been taken for a great deal younger.

His costume consisted of a fancy and expensive riding suit, and it fitted him as neat as a pin.

This man was a stranger in town. A minute before he had rode up, dismounted and turned his horse over to the hostler. Then he came in the barroom and invited all hands to have something.

The men in the place were not of the sort who refuse such invitations, and they all promptly lined up.

"Your very good health, gentlemen!" and the dark-faced stranger drained his glass like a veteran.

It was just at this juncture that Race Neville and Merle Baxter entered the place in search of the proper man to whom to make their report.

They had been told that the "mayor" was in the barroom, so they did not hesitate to enter.

Merle knew him very well, and he had no difficulty in picking him out from among the crowd.

In a very few words he told him what they found at the outskirts of the town.

"Killed by Daring Dave, hey?" echoed the mayor. "I've heard tell of that feller who has been a-makin' it so warm about this vicinity of Diamond Bar!"

Race Neville was looking straight at the handsome stranger as these words rang out, and he saw him give a violent start.

But he recovered himself instantly, and was apparently as attentive to what was being said as any of the rest.

However, the boy's suspicions were aroused and he kept his eye on the man.

"Some one must go an' git ther dead feller an' give him a berth under the sod," observed the mayor. "Young Baxter will show ther way to ther place, I guess."

"Certainly!" exclaimed Merle.

"Gentlemen, if I can be of any assistance I will be only too glad," spoke up the stranger. "I intend to remain in this town over night, and I may be able to help you capture this villain called Daring Dave. What sort of looking fellow is he, anyhow? Does any one know?"

"He looks exactly like you!"

Race Neville uttered these startling words almost before he was aware of it.

The face of every man in the barroom underwent a change. The loungers looked on in surprise, while the stranger turned white.

"What do you mean, boy?" he hoarsely demanded; and then he placed his hand in his pocket and drew a handkerchief to wipe the beads of perspiration that were fast forming on his brow.

Before Race could make a reply an excited howl went up from the miners.

The handkerchief was stained with blood!

"I mean that you are Daring Dave!" cried the boy from New York; "your actions have given you away. But the rich silver lode is lost to you forever!"

Merle Baxter could scarcely believe his senses. The remarkable action of his cousin fairly took his breath away.

How was it that Race—a boy from the East, and not supposed to possess the nerve of one brought up in the West—dared to say what he did to the stranger, even if he did think he was the murderer?

While Merle was trying to think what it all meant, the dark-faced man stood gazing at Race with immovable countenance.

The bloody handkerchief dropped from his hand to the floor, and the mayor promptly picked it up.

Then the stranger spoke.

"Young fellow," said he, in a cool, measured tone, "I can see



that you are from the East, and if it was not for that fact, I would drop you dead in your tracks for daring to accuse me of killing the man you found dead. You might call this a joke where you came from, but it is not here."

His hand slid to the butt of his revolver as he ceased speaking, and he backed up against the wall.

Then to the astonishment of all hands Race took a step toward him and exclaimed:

"You admit that you are Daring Dave, then?"

A deathly silence followed for the space of ten seconds, and then an angry gleam shot from the accused man's eyes, and out came his revolver.

"Yes, I admit that I am Daring Dave, the outlaw! What about it?"

His eyes swept the faces of every one present in an instant, and a reckless smile hovered about the corners of his lips.

It struck all hands that he was a man to be feared—at least, all but one.

That one was Race Neville.

The boy had no more horror of the black muzzle that was staring him in the face than if he had been facing a popgun in the hands of a four-year-old child.

He was sure that this was the murderer of the man who had tried to tell his cousin and himself about the silver lode which was now lost.

And he meant to bring the man to a just punishment for committing the foul deed.

Merle expected to see his bold cousin drop with a bullet through his brain, and he, like the rest present, dared not draw his own shooter for fear that such would certainly be the case.

Five seconds passed.

Then a startling thing happened.

There was a quick movement on the part of Race, and the stranger's revolver fell to the floor fully ten feet distant from him.

Two quick blows followed this remarkable action, and then the boy from New York had the outlaw down upon the floor with his knees upon his chest and the muzzle of a six-shooter pressing against his nose.

A murmur of admiration went up from the men in the bar-room. Never before had they seen such a daring performance.

"You have admitted that you are the murderer, so you are my prisoner!" Race exclaimed. "Handcuff him, some of you!"

"We hain't got any handcuffs, but I reckon a good rope'll answer," retorted the mayor, starting to carry out the boy's instructions.

Every man present now had a revolver in his hand, so the mayor ordered the outlaw to get up.

He did so quickly enough, and then with a yell of defiance made a bound for the door.

This action was so unexpected that he was outside before any one could raise a hand to prevent him.

Around the corner of the house the outlaw ran through the darkness.

By a streak of luck he reached the stable and found the hostler at work on his horse.

He had drawn another revolver, and one blow from the butt of it sent the hostler senseless to the ground.

In much quicker time than it takes to write it the villain was upon the back of his steed, galloping off into the darkness of the night.

A score or more of bullets flew about his ears, but not one touched him, and with a yell of defiance he disappeared.

"That is too bad!" observed Race, as he saw some of the men mounting their horses to start in pursuit.

"You are right!" exclaimed his cousin; and patting him on the shoulder he added:

"Race, you have got more sand in you than I believed. Go with you to find the lost silver lode? Well, I guess I will!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### STARTLING EVENTS.

The excitement caused by the advent of Daring Dave in Glendale was long and pronounced.

The murdered miner was given a decent burial, and there was one more unknown grave in the little cemetery, for there was nothing upon the man's person to tell who he was.

Merle had not the least trouble in getting the consent of his father to go to Diamond Bar on a prospecting trip. His mother was dead, so there was no gentle woman to persuade him to stay at home.

A day or two later the cousins set out, mounted on good horses and well equipped for the journey.

At Merle's suggestion Race had been practicing a great deal with the revolver, and he promised to become an adept in its use.

Unused to the saddle as he was, the boy from New York rode like an "old-timer," and excited the admiration of his cousin.

Though the distance from Glendale to Diamond Bar was but in the neighborhood of fifty miles, it took them a good fourteen hours to reach the mountain pass that led into it, half a mile away.

It was a very dark night and the distant mutterings in the sky betokened an approaching thunderstorm.

Both boys were anxious to get to their destination, so they urged their tired horses forward at a faster gait.

But they had not proceeded over ten yards through the pass when a pistol shot rang out close at hand.

The cousins reined in their steeds and came to a halt.

Just what direction the shot came from they could not tell.

But a few seconds later they found out.

There was a clatter of hoofs, and a stentorian voice commanded them to throw up their hands.

A dozen horsemen surrounded them, and it was out of the question to do anything else but obey the order.

Up went the boys' hands, and then a masked man came up close to them and flashed the light from a bull's-eye lantern in their faces.

A moment later Race was lifted from the saddle so quickly that he hardly knew what had happened.

Then Merle's horse received a cut from a whip and galloped away in the darkness.

Before the boy could bring the animal under anything like control the band of riders had disappeared.

Race's horse came trotting up to him, but the saddle was devoid of the New York boy.

"What can this mean?" exclaimed the astounded Merle. "I thought we were going to be robbed of what little money we had, but instead of that Race was kidnaped as quick as a flash of lightning. What I am to do now I don't know."

At that moment huge drops of rain began falling, and it behooved the boy to get to some shelter if he did not wish to get wet to the skin.

After a moment's thought he concluded to go on to Diamond Bar, which was but a short distance now, and report what had happened, hoping he could get some one to help him find his cousin.



The rain began falling faster than ever, so he set out at a sharp canter, leading the riderless horse at his side.

In a very few minutes he came to a good-sized log house. A bright light showed through the windows, and, as he was getting pretty well soaked, Merle came to a halt.

The moment he did so the door opened and an elderly man stepped out.

"Hello, stranger!" he cried, cheerily. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I should like to come in until the rain is over," Merle replied. "I am in trouble."

"Jump off your horse. What! two of 'em, hey? An' one is without a rider! I wouldn't be surprised if you are in trouble, boy. Where's the other feller?"

"I don't know," and then, as they led the animals to the shelter of a shed near by, he told the man what had just happened in the mountain pass.

"Bad work, bad work!" said the man, half to himself; and then, turning to Merle, he added:

"Come in the house. My name is Jeff Hope, an' I live here, jist at the outskirts of Diamond Bar, along with my wife an' son Bill an' two daughters, Millie an' Rosy. We are a healthy family, I kin tell you, an' there ain't one of us that can't handle a rifle or six-shooter as well as any one around these diggings. My son Bill keeps the supply store at the Bar."

Merle smiled in spite of his dismal feelings. The old fellow rattled it off so fast that it wouldn't have taken him many minutes to have related his life story from babyhood to the present moment.

But he did not hesitate to accept the invitation to enter the house, and shaking the rain from his hat he followed Mr. Hope inside.

A plain but neatly furnished room greeted his eyes, occupied by a mild-faced woman of forty-five and two very pretty girls of fifteen and seventeen.

"Bill ain't got back from the store yet," explained Jeff Hope. "Mr.——"

"Baxter—Merle Baxter."

"Oh, yes! Mr. Baxter, my wife and daughters, Millie and Rosy."

Merle took the proffered hands of the ladies and greeted them as politely as he knew how.

The mother busied herself about the cupboard, evidently with the intention of getting their guest something to eat.

But before she could lay the cloth there came a sharp rap at the door.

The old man hurried forward and opened it.

Some one said good evening in a voice Merle seemed to recognize, and he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the visitor's face when he came in.

Then it was that the boy gave a violent start.

He had met the visitor before!

It was Daring Dave, the outlaw chief!

But he did not let any one notice that he knew who the dark, handsome man was, and kept his head turned the other way as much as possible.

Jeff Hope's face had darkened the moment he opened the door, and before the outlaw could sit down he said in a firm voice:

"Mr. Morrow, I told you once before that you was not welcome here; so now I tell you to git out of my house!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN THE OUTLAW'S DEN.

As Race Neville was jerked from the back of his horse a rope was wound tightly about his body, pinioning his arms, and a heavy hand was clapped over his mouth.

He knew he was hanging over the back of a horse, on which there was a rider already, but he dared not make an effort to get off for fear of pitching head first and being trampled to death.

The men who had captured him allowed their horses to walk, and by the strained movements of the animal he was upon Race realized that they were going up hill.

At the expiration of five minutes one of the band called a halt.

The captive boy was allowed to slide to the ground and land upon his feet, and then a silken handkerchief was bound tightly over his eyes.

Then he was led around in a circle until rain began falling, when he was lifted bodily and carried into a place he knew not where.

While all this had been happening the boy had not lost his nerve.

True, he was not in an easy frame of mind, but it never once entered his head that his life was in danger.

He knew if his captors had wanted to kill him they would never have taken the trouble to pull him from his horse and carry him away. One shot would have done the business the instant after the lantern was flashed in his face.

It was puzzling to him why he had been captured, though, and he could not for the life of him conceive why it was.

Merle had not been touched. He knew that, for he saw his horse gallop away in the darkness with him.

Race was destined to learn all about it in a very short time. He heard a thud near him which sounded like a heavy door shutting, and then the bandage was whisked from his eyes.

A bright light almost blinded him, and it was several seconds before he could distinguish that he was in a large, roomy cave.

A number of men, whose faces were concealed by black masks, stood about him in a circle.

They were all armed to the teeth, and their eyes, in the dazzling light, seemed to gleam like coals of fire.

Presently one of their number stepped in front of Race and removed his mask.

The boy gave a start and uttered a subdued cry.

It was Daring Dave who was facing him.

It now flashed upon him why he had been kidnaped. The outlaw captain had done it to revenge himself for what had happened at Glendale.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the villain; "so you know me, I see?"

"Yes, I know you," was the bold answer. "I don't see why you want to bother with me, though."

"You don't mean that when you say it. You know as well as I do what I want of you."

"You probably want to get square with me for knocking you down in the barroom at Glendale."

"No, that isn't it at all. I want you to tell me just what the dying man told you about the rich silver lode that is located somewhere in this vicinity."

As Daring Dave spoke he leaned forward expectantly.

"I know no more about the lost lode than you," Race replied, calmly. "Probably I do not know as much."

"Young man, you know all about it, and if you do not tell me where it is I'll see that you die a violent death, and that very soon."



"The man you murdered died before he could tell us where it was."

"Boy, you lie! You came out here to work upon that lode and get rich; you know you did."

"Yes, I'll admit that I came out here with my cousin to try and find it."

"Well, if you consider your life worth anything you will tell me all you know about it, and then light out for the East as fast as you can get there."

As the outlaw captain uttered these words the expression on his face showed that he meant just what he said.

Race began to grow uneasy.

He saw that the man would not be convinced of anything else than that he knew where the vein of silver was.

He thought of how the discoverer of the treasure had lost his life just because he refused to tell where it was, and it began to dawn upon him that he might suffer the same fate.

After a minute of consideration, during which time a deathly silence prevailed, he said:

"I can tell you word for word what the dying man said; if I do so will you give me my liberty?"

"If you tell me where the lode is I will give you your liberty—on no other conditions can I do it."

"I cannot tell you that because I do not know. If the man you killed was the only person who knew where it was, it is lost and must be found over again."

"I'll give you till to-morrow morning to make up your mind," said the captain, coolly, as he glanced at his watch. "I have an appointment to keep now and I must be going. Men, lock him in the dark and give him the free use of his hands and feet, but see that he has no weapons when he goes in."

The villain turned on his heel and Race was marched to the other end of the underground headquarters.

A rough oaken door was unlocked and he was thrust in a dark, musty apartment.

Once inside the men removed his weapons, and then severed his bonds.

"Now you can yell for help all you want to, an' try to git out as much as you please, but you'll stay right where you are, just the same," observed one of the villains mockingly, as he passed out.

Race made an effort to follow, but the door was slammed shut and locked before he could reach it.

Not knowing what else to do, the boy threw himself on the ground.

After pondering over his condition for a few minutes he lighted a match.

As the sickly flame flared up he saw that the place he was in was not over eight feet square.

To all appearances it was cut out of a solid rock, and he realized that it would be useless to attempt to leave by any other way than the door.

For an hour he sat there in the darkness, and then he was startled by hearing the shrill scream of a female in the outer cave.

Race sprang to his feet.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he started for the door.

At that very moment some one turned the key from the outside.

The next instant the boy pulled it open and darted out of the dungeon.

A startling sight met his gaze.

Standing in the midst of his men was Daring Dave, the form of a beautiful girl struggling in his arms.

Enraged at the sight and forgetful of the fact that he was a

prisoner in the outlaws' den, Race seized a revolver from the belt of the nearest man to him and bounded forward to the girl's assistance.

## CHAPTER V.

### ANOTHER ABDUCTION.

Instead of obeying Jeff Hope's command to leave the house, Daring Dave whipped out a revolver and placed it to his head.

"When you get contrary so do I," he said. "Sit still there, young fellow!"

The last sentence was addressed to Merle Baxter, who was in the act of rising from his chair with his hand on the revolver in his belt.

At that instant the muzzles of four rifles showed up in the doorway, and the shadows of as many dark forms could be seen behind them.

Merle thought it best to do as the outlaw captain said.

It would be but an act of madness on his part for him to try and fight it out with the villains.

So he sat there in dismay and saw one of the dripping men shuffle into the room past his captain and the helpless owner of the house.

Merle scarcely realized what the fellow was up to until he saw him approach the elder of the terrified girls.

"If any one moves an inch it will be the last motion they will ever make!" exclaimed Daring Dave, sternly.

As the words left his lips a cloak was thrown over the head of Millie Hope, and she was whisked out into the falling rain.

Her father made a mighty effort to follow her, but a quick blow from the butt of the outlaw captain's revolver stretched him senseless on the floor.

The barrels of two rifles were still protruding through the doorway, and Merle dared not make a move.

For fully five minutes they remained there, and then suddenly they were gone, the door was slammed to, and our young friend was alone with the mother and daughter, and the unconscious father lying before him.

Great beads of perspiration were on the boy's brow when he arose from the chair.

"A fearful outrage has been committed!" he managed to gasp as he faced the terrified females. "That man was Daring Dave, and I am now sure that it was he and his gang that kidnaped my cousin."

"And he has stolen Millie from us!" wailed Mrs. Hope, wringing her hands.

"When he first began calling here we thought he was a gentleman," added Rosy.

Merle now turned his attention to the old man on the floor.

As he lifted his head Hope showed signs of returning consciousness, and a minute later he opened his eyes.

"Where is the scoundrel?" he cried. "Let me once lay hands on him and I'll choke the life out of him!"

"He has made good his escape," returned the boy. "If you are able to sit up, Mr. Hope, I'll help you to a chair."

His wife and daughter hastened to assist him, and soon the dazed man was seated in a rocker.

It was at least five minutes before he fully realized what had happened, and when he did he sprang to his feet, and putting on his coat and hat, exclaimed:

"Come, boy! Help me to rescue Millie from that scoundrel's clutches!"

Out into the rain he dashed, and after him followed Merle Baxter.



"The question now is whether they were mounted or on foot," said the boy. "When the villains held up my cousin and I they were on horseback."

"It is quite likely they had their horses with 'em," retorted Hope. "We'll take these two of yours an' follow 'em, if you've no objections."

"Take them! Of course we will; your daughter must be rescued!" Merle exclaimed, untying his horse as he spoke.

A minute later the two were mounted.

The rain was falling steadily, but Merle was so excited over the startling events of the night that he did not mind the wetting he was receiving.

Jeff Hope led the way through the pass at a reckless gallop. He did not stop to think that it was possible that the outlaws had gone up the side of the mountain; his idea was that they had gone straight along the trail and he meant to overtake them.

And Merle, entirely unacquainted with the country, left it to the old man.

In a very short time they had traversed the entire length of the pass, and they had neither seen nor heard a sound of the outlaws.

In a dejected manner Jeff Hope reined his horse to a halt.

"We have lost track of them," he said.

"Yes; they must have a hangout somewhere on the mountain-side," Merle answered.

"We will go back to the house and wait until daylight comes. That cowardly scoundrel of a Morrow has been paying attention to Millie for the past few months and she detests the very sight of him. I had no idea he was the dreaded Daring Dave, but I knew he was not what he represented himself to be from the very start."

The miner groaned in an agonized manner as he thought of the probable fate of his daughter.

"Cheer up; your name suggests something that gives me courage," observed the boy. "I am confident we will save both your daughter and my cousin from being harmed before many hours."

"Yes," was the reply, "my name is Hope, I know, and I shan't give up yet. We will go back to the house now. Bill, my son, will be home by the time we get there. He has heard tell a great deal about Daring Dave and his band of outlaws, who have showed themselves around here lately, and he may be able to help us out."

"I hope so," and Merle turned his horse about and started back through the pass.

They reached the house without meeting a soul, or hearing a sound other than that made by the falling rain.

Contrary to his usual custom, Bill had not yet arrived, and the mother and daughter were in a great state of anxiety.

They sat on chairs facing the door, with rifles in their hands, ready to shoot down the first unwelcome visitor who appeared.

But they quickly recognized the voice of Hope, and let him and Merle in.

It was long past midnight when the son arrived.

He was a fine-looking young man of twenty-four, and there was such an anxious look on his face that Merle thought he must have heard of the abduction of his sister.

"Where have you been so long, Bill?" asked his father.

"I've been straightening up accounts down at the office," was the reply.

"I don't believe you, Bill."

A flush came over the young man's face, and he walked toward the door of another room.

"You've been gambling again, Bill," Merle heard the mother say.

"Yes, an' while you've been sittin' at ther card table your sister Millie has been sneaked away by that scoundrel of a Morrow!" thundered the old man.

Bill Hope jumped as though he had been shot.

"What!" he gasped.

"It is so, my son," said Mrs. Hope; and then for the twentieth time that night she burst into a flood of tears.

Merle felt very uneasy. The scene was a very distressing one to him, so he arose and, putting on his hat, went outside and stood under the horse shed to keep out of the rain. For half an hour he remained there, thinking over the abduction of Race and the girl, and even then he would not have gone in the house had not young Hope come out after him.

"Come on in and we will turn in," he said. "The row is all over now, and I think we will find a way to get Millie back inside of twenty-four hours. I had no idea that Morrow was such a villain. I always liked him pretty well, and took him to be a gentleman."

"He is no other than the notorious Daring Dave," Merle answered.

"So pop tells me. Well, come in and we'll get a little sleep, so we can get at it the first thing in the morning."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PEAK OF JARVIS MOUNTAIN.

Merle slept but little that night. He was up as soon as day had fairly broken.

When he went outside he found that the storm had ceased, and the golden sky in the east gave promise of a pleasant day.

Bill Hope came out a few minutes later.

"As soon as breakfast is over we will go over to the bar and tell the captain of the vigilantes what happened last night. If anybody knows what to do, Jim Decker does," said he.

"You have a vigilance committee at Diamond Bar, then?" asked Merle.

"Oh, yes. It was started almost as soon as the town was."

"What is the population of the bar?"

"About three hundred and fifty, three-fourths of whom are men trying to get rich at digging gold."

"Are there no silver mines around here?"

"No," replied Bill; "though I heard a month or two ago about a rich lode of the white metal being located on the mountainside. No one knows who found it, or where it is, so it is hardly worth believing."

"Is there much gold found about here?"

"Just enough to encourage the miners to keep on working. A silver lode, like the one that is reported to be on the mountain, would be worth a dozen of the best claims at the bar."

"My cousin and I came out here for the express purpose of finding the lode of silver you mention," asserted Merle, quietly.

"You did!" exclaimed young Hope. "You heard about it in Glendale, then?"

"Yes; we heard about it the same night we met Daring Dave, or Mr. Morrow, as you call him."

"Well, I hope you will succeed in finding it; but I wouldn't be afraid to bet a hundred spot that you won't."

"I don't believe in making wagers," Merle answered.

"Oh, you don't? Well, you will if you stay about Diamond Bar very long. A fellow who does not bet and play poker is not in the swim around here."

At this juncture Mrs. Hope called them in to breakfast, and as Merle sat down he made up his mind that Bill was a very nice



fellow, but that he had one bad habit—that of a confirmed gambler.

As it was only a short distance, the pair walked over to the bar after breakfast.

The inhabitants were early risers, and the half dozen shanty saloons in the place were already doing a thriving business.

Diamond Bar was a funny place to be called a town, so Merle thought. There was not a building in it that could be fairly called a house, and the only thing that made it look shipshape at all was that all the shanties were built upon a straight, level street, which was at least a hundred feet in width.

The flag of the Union floated above the post office, and this was about the most pleasing thing that struck Merle's eye.

Bill Hope led the way direct to the hangout of the captain of the vigilantes, which was at the principal saloon, and found that worthy standing at the bar indulging in a morning "bracer."

Jim Decker was his name, and Merle was promptly introduced to him.

The man was a big, powerful fellow, standing six feet four inches, and the expression on his face showed that he was of an honest and kindly disposition.

"Young feller, I like your looks an' shape!" was the blunt exclamation of the big miner. "Now, then, Bill Hope, what's brought ye out so early?"

In an excited manner young Hope related what had happened the night before.

Jim Decker was amazed when he heard that Morrow and the outlaw captain were one and the same person.

"Great boots!" he cried; "we'll make that gang howl for this. If Morrow dares ter show up here ag'in he'll git a rope cravat as sure as my name is Jim Decker!"

As Bill had failed to say anything about his troubles, Merle told the captain of the vigilantes how Race Neville had been whisked away in the darkness by a gang of cutthroats.

"They were the same ones that abducted Miss Hope," he added. "I am quite sure of it, because Daring Dave was down on my cousin for giving him a thrashing in Glendale."

"A boy give him a thrashin'?" echoed the miner.

"Yes, and he did it with all the odds against him."

"An' he's from ther East, you say?"

"Yes, he is a New Yorker—born and bred in that city."

"I want ter git acquainted with him!" and down came his big fist on the bar to show that he meant it.

"Come, boys, an' have a drink," he added. "Then we'll git ther gang together an' go out an' find this gal an' boy afore breakfast!"

Merle took a cigar, which cost the captain of the vigilantes fifty cents. This might seem an exorbitant price, but where the miners were making from ten to forty dollars a day, fifty cents was not much to them.

Jim Decker was as good as his word, for in less than fifteen minutes he had a score of determined men, mounted on good horses, at his back.

Bill Hope was forced to go to the post office, as a mail coach was due in less than an hour; so Merle hastened to the house of Hope, and he and the old man joined the ranks of the vigilantes.

"We will scour ther country hereabouts," said Jim Decker, "an' look in every hole an' corner. If we happen to come across Morrow, an' find that we can't take him alive, boys, jist fill his carcass with lead! Ye hear what I say?"

"Yes, yes!" came the unanimous reply.

"Now keep yer eyes peeled. Darin' Dave and his infernal gang are located somewhere around these diggin's, an' we've got 'er find 'em!"

The big man's words inspired Merle with a feeling of hope, and he concluded that the chances of rescuing Race and the girl were good.

Up the zigzag paths on the mountainside the searching party went, not passing a niche or crevice in a rock without examining it.

But at the expiration of two hours they were no better off than when they first set out.

Our young friend was fast getting discouraged when he suddenly looked up and beheld a sharp mountain peak some distance before him.

"What peak is that?" he asked Jim Decker.

"That's Jarvis Peak," was the reply.

The peak of Jarvis Mountain! seventy-six yards from that the lost lode was located!

Merle gave a start as he realized this.

"How long do you suppose the sun has been up?" said he.

"Pretty nigh four hours, I reckon," retorted one of the men.

The boy looked around for the shadow of the peak on the ground.

Before he could make a note of it his horse stumbled, throwing him from the saddle.

The sloping bank of a ravine was right before him, and before he could save himself Merle went rolling downward!

## CHAPTER VII.

### A BOLD STROKE.

Had a bomb exploded in the den of the outlaws Daring Dave could not have been more astonished than when Race Neville sprang toward him with leveled revolver.

"Hands off that girl!" exclaimed the boy, placing the muzzle of the weapon within a few inches of the villain's head.

The captain immediately let go his hold upon the struggling captive. He knew what sort of stuff Race was made of, as he had had dealings with him before.

The moment the girl was free she did exactly the same thing the boy did when he appeared on the scene—she seized a revolver from the belt of a spellbound man.

That she was one of the plucky sort was apparent, for in a voice that rang like the peal of a silver bell, she exclaimed:

"Mr. Morrow, order me to be released at once, or I will shoot you down like a dog! Do as I say!"

"And give the same order for me," said Race, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"Seize them, some of you!" cried Daring Dave, in a voice that trembled with both rage and fear. "Men, what do you mean by standing there like a lot of statues?"

"Stop!" thundered the young New Yorker, as some of the men made a move to start toward him. "Take another step, and your captain dies in his tracks!"

A deathly silence followed, and every villain remained motionless.

They looked at each other in blank dismay, knowing full well that both the boy and the girl would do exactly as they said they would.

It was a striking situation—one that no one present would be likely to forget. A boy and a mere child in petticoats holding over a score of desperate criminals in their tracks—not one of them daring to so much as lift his hand for fear of seeing their leader drop dead before them.

As the reader no doubt guesses, the girl was no other than Millie Hope. She was one of the sort who can always take her own part if she only has the least show.



She was quick to think and quick to act, too.

Millie remembered the way she had been brought in the den, as the cloak had been thrown from her head the moment she was carried out of the reach of the falling rain.

While her young champion was holding the attention of the outlaws she darted swiftly toward the exit of the main chamber.

She opened the first door she came to, and that proved to belong to a sort of small closet.

The brave girl was just about to close the door and look for another when her eyes lit upon several cans of nitro-glycerine in the closet.

She knew what they were the instant she saw them, for her father had used them on more than one occasion to split large rocks asunder.

Seizing one of the dangerous explosives, Millie darted back to the center of the underground apartment.

There was not a man present who did not recognize what it was in her hand when she held it aloft.

Their faces turned pale as death, and one of them fixed his eyes upon Daring Dave and said:

"Let her go, cap; she's a regular witch!"

"You may go on out about your business, girl," faltered the villain. "That is, if you can find the way."

"I demand that the young gentleman who has taken my part shall show me the way!" was the cool rejoinder. "If you refuse I will toss this can of nitro-glycerine on the ground, and you know what will happen then."

The plucky girl was more than master of the situation. She was able to make the villains do anything she said.

Daring Dave, with his eyes fixed upon the gleaming revolver in the hand of Race, faltered out the words:

"Go on with her, boy!"

"Thank you," replied the young fellow, a smile curving about his lips; "I hope you are quite done with me now."

"Go on!" the outlaw captain cried, hoarsely. "You are both free to go where you will. Don't let that can drop till you get well away from here; I am only human, and I don't want to die just yet."

"You may call yourself human, but I do not," said Race, as he slowly backed toward the plucky girl. "Anyhow, we will go about our business."

"And if anybody follows or interferes with us I shall throw this nitro-glycerine at them," added Millie, with a ring of triumph in her voice.

Not one of the villains deemed it necessary to make a reply to this, and as still as statues they watched the pair of young people slowly approach the door that opened into the passage that led to the exit.

Race opened the door, while Millie stood facing the band with the explosive poised in her right hand, ready to hurl it upon the rocky floor.

The guard who was stationed in the passage must have heard what transpired inside, for he immediately threw up his hands when Race appeared before him.

"Don't shoot, young feller," said he. "This is ther way out, though it ain't ther same way we came in. It won't do you any good ter try an' locate ther place, for you couldn't find it in a hundred years."

"We will take our chances on that," spoke up the brave girl. "What we want now is to get out, and if we don't do it some one will be apt to die a sudden death."

"It ain't a-goin' ter be me, not if I knows myself," returned the sentinel. "Go on; ther quicker you git a good distance from here ther better it will be for all of us!"

Keeping their eyes fixed on the man, Race and the girl made their way slowly through the passage.

In less than a minute they reached a place where it appeared as though they could go no further.

"They have played us false!" exclaimed Millie. "What will we do now? I——"

"Wait!" interrupted her companion. "Here is the way out. I felt the wall move when I leaned against it. Ah!"

He pushed upon the apparently solid rock, which was really painted canvass, and a draught of fresh air blew in their faces.

The next minute the young couple, who had so strangely been brought together, were outside in the falling rain.

"Come!" exclaimed Millie, "they dare not follow us, for fear I will drop this can. Let us hurry to my home. You are the young man who was lifted from his horse without warning and then carried away in the darkness, are you not?"

"Yes," said Race, eagerly. "You have seen my cousin, then?"

"I have. He was in my father's house when the villain, Morrow, abducted me."

"Daring Dave, you mean."

"Was that man the noted outlaw captain?"

"Yes. This is not the first time he and I have met, nor is it likely to be the last time, after what has happened to-night."

The two were hurrying from the spot as fast as they could, though it was impossible to make much headway, owing to the inky blackness of the night and the roughness of their path.

Suddenly it occurred to Race that he had not even tried to locate the place where they emerged from the underground den.

"Pshaw!" he cried, "I am a fool."

Before his fair companion could make a reply the earth crumbled beneath their feet and both were precipitated into a stream of swiftly running water.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE PIT.

As Merle went tumbling down the hill there was but one thought in his mind, and that was to save himself from being injured.

He clutched wildly at the bushes that were rooted in the side of the ravine, and though they checked his progress somewhat, they were not strong enough to hold his weight.

Crash—bump—thud! He landed at the bottom plump on his back.

His breath was nearly taken away by the fall, but notwithstanding this he was on his feet almost immediately.

"Are you hurt?" asked Jeff Hope from above.

"No; only badly shaken up, that's all," Merle answered. "How am I going to get out of here?"

"Walk along to the right a few yards and you'll find an easy place to climb up," was the reply. "We will wait for you here."

Merle started ahead, and soon came to a spot where it would be easy to climb out.

However, before he started to do so he glanced upward.

There was the peak of Jarvis Mountain almost directly over his head, and it was hardly seventy-six yards distant.

"The Lost Lode!" exclaimed the boy under his breath; "it must be close by here somewhere. Ah! there is the shadow! Why, it runs right across that brook."

At that moment he heard the voice of Jeff Hope calling him to hurry.

"All right," he answered, "I will be there in a minute. Go on; I'll catch you."

But he had no intention of leaving just then. He had discov-



ered what the peak cast a shadow upon, and he desired to investigate more closely.

"Whew! what a strong current!" he exclaimed, as he stepped to the side of the mountain. "And how deep the water is! A person could not swim up that stream to save his life. Hello, it goes underground, or I'm a blockhead! Ah! what is that shining so in that dark hole? Eureka!"

One after another Merle uttered these exclamations, and as the last one left his lips he leaned over the bank of the stream and peered eagerly into the dark opening it lost itself in.

He leaned just a trifle too far, for the dirt crumbled from beneath his knees, and without further warning he fell headforemost into the rushing stream.

Whizz—whirr! Then a drop of a dozen feet and Merle was swimming in comparatively still water!

It was not light enough for him to see exactly what sort of a place he was in, but he knew he had passed over a waterfall and landed into deep water.

Of course he was somewhat confused, but this feeling quickly wore off and he struck out for the opening, a few feet distant, where the light came in.

He found he could touch bottom before he got there, so he waded the rest of the distance.

As he emerged into the light of day Merle gave a violent start.

And no wonder! Not twenty feet distant he saw his cousin, Race Neville, fishing in the stream!

But that was not all! Near him, busily engaged in kindling a fire, was the identical girl Daring Dave had abducted the night before.

The boy could scarcely believe his senses. He rubbed his eyes to see if he was dreaming, and then, unable to restrain himself, he uttered a yell of joy.

The two young people turned as though they had been shot.

"Don't you know me?" cried Merle.

"Well, I guess so!" exclaimed his cousin. "How came you here, old fellow?"

"An accident brought me."

"The same thing brought us here."

"I have been looking for you," said Merle. "Tell me how you got away from the outlaws."

Race narrated the exciting events that took place in the headquarters of Daring Dave, while his cousin listened in open-mouthed amazement.

"When we fell into the stream of water I made up my mind that my end had come," the New York boy went on. "Miss Hope had the can of nitro-glycerine in her hands at the time, and what became of it we don't know. At any rate it did not explode.

"We were whirled along at lightning speed for what seemed a long while, but in reality it could not have been over five minutes, and then we sailed over the little cataract and landed safe and sound in smooth water.

"This happened last night, and here we are yet, because we can find no way to get out."

"That's so, we are in a kind of a prison," said Merle, as he glanced about him.

It was a sort of pit, with smooth, perpendicular sides that they were in.

It was not over fifty by thirty, and an overhanging ledge nearly covered the entire opening.

The biggest part of the place was a miniature lake, and in this Race was fishing with an improvised hook and line, made from a bent pin and the strands of a piece of rope.

He found an angleworm for bait, but he might have fished

until doomsday without getting a bite, for there were no fish there.

The water was but the result of the freshet caused by the storm, and in a few hours the bottom of the pit would be dry.

Millie Hope told him this, but Race desired to be doing something to pass away the time, so he started in to fish.

"Your father and the vigilantes will be along presently and will find us," said Merle to the girl. "They were with me when I tumbled into the ravine."

"And if they don't find us we will have to wait until the stream dries up sufficiently to allow us to climb the rocks it dashes over," replied Millie.

"And we have nothing to eat!" exclaimed Race, putting on a wry face.

"We will shout to try and attract the attention of our friends," observed Merle, stamping about in his endeavor to shake some of the moisture from his garments. "Now, then! I'll fire my revolver, and then all of us will join in a good yell!"

Crack! He-e-el-lo!

The echoes came back to their ears, but there was no answering cry.

But just then something else happened that was truly startling. A deafening explosion rang out from the direction of the little waterfall, and the earth and stones tumbled all around them.

"The can of nitro-glycerine—that must have caused it!" gasped Race.

"Look at this!" said Merle, as he picked up a chunk of virgin silver. "Race, we have surely found the Lost Lode!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LOST LODE, AND A GOOD SHOT.

"The Lost Lode!" echoed Race, as he gazed with distended eyes at the chunk of silver Merle held in his hand. "Old fellow, you are right! This must certainly be the spot the dying man tried to tell us about."

Millie Hope looked on interestedly, but did not say a word.

Evidently she regarded the cousins as very lucky mortals, for the expression of her countenance showed nothing but admiration.

At length Race turned to her.

"You will please excuse us, Miss Hope, for ignoring you in this matter—I hope you will when I tell you that we are now in possession of a silver lode that we came to Diamond Bar on purpose to find. Please say nothing about this outside of your family. We shall tell your father all about it and get him to help us work this vein."

"I assure you that I shall never say a word concerning the lode," said Millie. "What you have found belongs to you, and no one else."

"Oh, no! you must come in for your share!" exclaimed Race. "You found it as much as we."

"That is right!" echoed Merle.

"Well, then, you two can be partners in the concern, and I will be one of the principal stockholders," Millie answered, with a ripple of laughter.

"That settles it, then," returned Race.

"Yes," spoke up his cousin. "Now let us see what else the explosion has done for us. It seems to me the water is rising, instead of going away."

"That is because the rock over which the cataract runs has been blown away," retorted Millie. "We ought to be able to get out of here very soon now."



Meanwhile the stream Race had been fishing in was rising to alarming proportions. In fact, it threatened to fill the entire pit! Our three young friends began to grow a trifle uneasy.

"Where does the water run off?" asked Merle. "You ought to know, for you have been here longer than I have."

"Right over there!" exclaimed Race and Millie, in a breath, pointing to a corner of the pit.

Merle hastened to the point indicated, being compelled to wade through the water part of the way.

One glance sufficed to show him why the water was rising so rapidly.

A log was wedged across the outlet of the stream, and a mass of leaves and other objects had collected behind it.

An energetic pull with his hands loosened the log, and away it went, the water following with a turbulent rush.

"Good!" exclaimed his cousin, who had been intently watching what was being done. "My! see how the water is lowering now!"

"Suppose we make a move to get out?" Millie suggested.

"Certainly."

The two boys pushed their way beneath the overhanging ledge of rock, and were soon standing upon what had been the foot of the cataract.

The water was still running swiftly, but its descent was more gradual, and it was not over six inches in depth.

Daylight could be plainly distinguished at the other end of the natural tunnel, not over twenty feet distant.

"We will make a try for liberty, anyhow!" cried Merle. "Come on, Race, and be careful to assist Miss Hope."

"I do not need much assistance," retorted Millie. "I am pretty sure-footed."

By dint of holding fast to the craggy sides they waded through the tunnel, and a minute or so later were at the spot where Merle tumbled in so unceremoniously.

Their hands clutched the white, shining metal as they passed through, but they did not stop to investigate or examine it.

That the lost silver lode had been found by them the boys were confident.

To get Jeff Hope to help them stake out the claim and work it was the next thing.

Merle led the way to the place where he had first started to climb out of the ravine, and just as they got there they heard voices calling them from above.

The voices came from Jeff Hope and the vigilantes.

Hope was overjoyed at finding his daughter alive and well, and he rushed forward and embraced her as the three came panting up the ascent.

Millie explained what had happened in as few words as possible.

The miners gave a cheer for her, and then Jeff Hope led in another for Race Neville.

"It are all right, as far as ther boy an' gal are consarned," said Jim Decker; "but Daring Dave an' his gang ain't downed yet, an' they've got ter be!"

"An' we'll stick to 'em till we do down 'em!" exclaimed one of the men.

"Right ye are!" chorused the rest.

"We will adjourn till to-night, and then we'll meet an' decide upon exactly what is ter be did," observed Jim Decker. "Come, boys! back we go to ther Bar."

Over the winding path down the mountainside they went, and in a short time the house of Jeff Hope was reached.

Millie's mother and sister were so glad to see her come back safe and sound that they fairly cried for joy.

After the vigilantes had gone Race and Merle had a private conversation with old man Hope.

They felt that they could trust him, so they told him all about the lost silver lode and why it was that they came out to Diamond Bar to search for it.

"If you are sure you've found it your fortunes are made," said Hope. "There will be hot old times when you begin to work it, though. Daring Dave will do his utmost to get possession of ther lode, an' from what little I know of ther scoundrel he won't stop for nothin'."

"We will try and work it secretly," returned Merle. "We want you to take full charge of the lode and work it on shares with us."

"And I would suggest that you build an addition on your house and let us board with you," added Race.

"I'll do both, an' I'll commence right away on ther house. We can make out somehow till ther extra room is finished. While I am at it I'm goin' to fix things so Daring Dave or any of his gang can't get inside of my shanty. I'm goin' to make double doors an' shutters."

"That will be a wise precaution," observed Race and Merle in a breath.

"I'll feel pretty safe then, 'specially when I've got ther boy partners of Diamond Bar on my side."

Hope was as good as his word. He started right in to build the addition to his house.

Merle and Race helped him until along about the middle of the afternoon, and then the two sisters came out and invited the boys to take a ride with them.

Both girls owned saddle horses and were accomplished riders, so of course the partners did not refuse to go out with them.

Fifteen minutes later the quartet started out, each armed with a rifle, revolver and knife.

Millie and Rosy wore neat costumes of deerskin and some red woven materials, and their heads were crowned with broad-brimmed hats of the same color.

That they made a pretty picture goes without saying.

"We will go through the Bar and take a look at the claims staked off around it," said Millie. "You can get a little information as to how the ore is dug out of the ground and washed. It is not likely that Morrow, or any of his men, will be around to interfere with us."

"If I should meet the villain I would not hesitate to shoot him dead in his tracks!" spoke up Rosy, as she gripped the barrel of her rifle and swung it around.

"You ought to see how Rosy can shoot!" exclaimed Millie. "She will have to show you what she can do before we get back. Father is willing to back her against any one in Diamond Bar."

As they passed the post office Merle saw Bill Hope with his back to the window, playing cards with two rough-looking men.

He had no difficulty in seeing a bottle and some glasses and a pile of money on the table, and it struck him that the young fellow was rushing at full speed along the road to ruin.

But he said nothing to his companions, who evidently had not been looking that way.

As they reached the end of the shanty town and turned to ride back a woman's scream rang out.

In an instant all eyes were turned in the direction the sound came from.

Our four young friends soon saw what caused the scream.

A drunken miner was beating his poor wife in front of one of the shanties.

In an instant Rosy Hope had her rifle in her hands.

"I'll show you how I can shoot now," she calmly said. "I am



going to take a piece out of that cowardly brute's left ear, just to teach him a lesson."

The back of the drunken man was turned toward them. He had just raised his hand to once more strike the woman when—

Crack! He gave a wild yell, clapped his hand to the side of his head, and then dropped to the ground.

Rosy led the way to the spot at a gallop.

"Get up!" she cried in ringing tones. "You are not hurt—only a part of your ear is missing. Go in the house and have it attended to, and if you ever strike a woman again you will get a bullet through your head!"

It was really ludicrous to see how meek the coward was, and how quickly he followed his wife into the house.

"I wouldn't give much for Daring Dave's chances if you ever drew bead on him," said Race, as he rode back home.

"He would be apt to die the instant my rifle cracked," returned Rosy, quietly.

## CHAPTER X.

### CARD PLAYING EXTRAORDINARY.

Bill Hope was probably the best educated young man in Diamond Bar when the post office was established there, and through the influence of his father and several stanch friends he got the appointment of postmaster.

As the mails arrived and departed but twice a week he had very little to do.

Still his position was a responsible one, and the residents of the little town were more than willing to chip in enough to make his salary figure up to about two hundred and fifty dollars per month.

Leading a life of comparative idleness, Bill learned to gamble and drink, and at the time the reader first became acquainted with him he was leading anything but a straightforward life.

As soon as Merle Neville and the vigilantes left to hunt up his stolen sister, Bill locked up the post office and hastened to the lowest and most vile resort in Diamond Bar.

The fact of his sister being spirited away by Morrow, alias Daring Dave, worried him considerably, and he began drinking.

He was well acquainted with this man Morrow—in fact, he was under certain obligations to him; and, what was more, he was a member of the famous villain's band of cutthroats!

It is not necessary to state how all this came about; Morrow was a gambler, and so was Bill Hope. A man will sometimes gamble his honor away, and that was how it was with Bill.

The young postmaster had taken his seat at a table in the corner of the room off the bar, and he was just pouring out his fourth glass of whiskey when a man wearing a heavy black beard came in and sat down near him.

"Hello, Bill!" exclaimed the newcomer in a low tone; "you don't know me, I see."

The young man gave a violent start, and then gazed searchingly into the speaker's eyes.

"Great Scott! is it you, cap?" he ejaculated.

"I guess it is, Bill, my boy," was the rejoinder.

"And you are here after what happened last night?"

"Yes; why not? You would not have known me if I had not forced you to; it isn't likely that any one else will."

The man, who was no other than Daring Dave, gave a little laugh.

"Have a drink, cap?"

"Yes, but when you see me in this rig hereafter address me as Jennings. I am supposed to be a post office inspector from the government. See?"

"Ye-es;" and Bill nodded admiringly.

"Well, as I am an inspector we will go over and see how your office looks. I have a great deal to say to you."

The young man arose from the table, and going into the bar-room, paid for what he had drank and purchased a bottle of whiskey; then he led the way to the post office, the disguised villain following.

"My sister, Millie, was kidnaped last night. That should not have been done," exclaimed Bill, as the pair neared the post office.

"It had to be done, young man, and it will have to be done again. She got away from me soon after I got her to the cave."

"She did?" echoed Bill. "That is rather queer. She had not showed up home when I left less than an hour ago."

"Do you mean that?" cried Daring Dave.

"I do."

"Something has happened to her, then; as sure as fate!" and the villain looked as though he was very much worried about it.

"See here, cap, are you joking with me?"

"I never was more serious in my life."

"Well, if she has walked over some precipice and gone to her death, you are to blame, cap."

"She was not alone when she left the cave."

"Not alone?" echoed Bill. "Who did she have with her?"

"One of the worst enemies I've got—a boy named Race Neville. He hails from the East, I believe."

"I heard of him this morning. Here we are at the post office. We will go inside, and then you can tell me all about it."

He unlocked the door as he finished speaking, and the two went inside.

The outlaw captain took a seat at a table near the window, and when the postmaster had followed suit he related just what had taken place the night before, and why it was that Millie made her escape from the cave in the company of Race Neville.

"It is mighty queer they didn't show up before I left the house," mused Bill.

"Let's have a drink out of that bottle!" exclaimed the disguised outlaw. "The thought that I might lose the girl, after all, makes me sick!"

"She is too pure and innocent for such as you, anyway. She might better be dead than to become your bride!" retorted the postmaster, with more spirit than he had yet shown.

"Have a care!" hissed Daring Dave. "You know you stole the government's money and gambled it away, and if it had not been for me you would have—"

"Enough!" cried Bill, his face as white as a sheet. "Here! take a drink."

With a sardonic grin, his evil companion poured some liquor in a glass and gulped it down.

"Now then, we will enjoy a nice little game of cards. Go out and hunt up some one who has got a thousand or two to lose."

The young man arose and meekly left the office.

He feared the outlaw captain as a mouse fears a cat, and he was beginning to hate him as well.

In a few minutes he returned with a big, hulking fellow who had recently struck it rich, and then the game began.

When noon came the players were pretty well even, and at the suggestion of the fraudulent government inspector they repaired to the nearest shanty hotel and ordered dinner.

At the dining-room table they made the acquaintance of a new arrival at Diamond Bar—a meek-faced, red-haired man, who was not slow in telling them that he hailed from the State of New Jersey.

He introduced himself as Lemuel Gates, and said he had come West to get rich.



The fellow seemed to feel highly honored when he learned that he was in the presence of the postmaster and an official from Washington.

"Very glad ter meet you!" he cried, as he shook hands. "I wish you gents would put me in the way of makin' some money. I've got a few hundred in my clothes now, but you know how it is—a feller is never satisfied."

Then it was that the draw poker subject came up, and Mr. Gates agreed to join them in a game at the post office after dinner.

Daring Dave and the postmaster exchanged glances. They were so elated at the prospect of fleecing the greenhorn that they forgot all about the lost girl both had appeared so anxious about.

The outlaw captain insisted on paying for the four dinners, and then they repaired to the room in the post office building.

At first Lemuel Gates appeared to be very "easy," but soon he began to do a little winning.

At the time when the boy partners and their fair companions rode past the Jerseyman was several hundred dollars ahead, and all four of the players were too much absorbed in the game to notice who was passing.

Daring Dave had been trying a long time to outwit Gates, but he had been foiled every time.

At length he determined to do something desperate, so when it came his deal he prepared himself for one of the dirtiest tricks a gambler could be guilty of in a game.

He gave the wink to Bill Hope as he dealt out the cards, and the young man managed to keep Gates' attention attracted while the villain dealt from the bottom of the pack.

The Jerseyman made the first bet, and Bill and the other man dropped out.

Daring Dave was sure that his opponent had four kings, and he was equally confident that he had four aces, though he had not yet looked at his cards.

But what puzzled him not a little was that Mr. Lemuel Gates had not looked at his, either.

"He is going in 'blind,' thinking he'll 'bluff' me out," thought the outlaw. "Well, I'll plank down a hundred better!"

He promptly did so, and the Jerseyman saw him and went two hundred better.

And still neither had looked at their cards!

"This is pretty good," observed the postmaster with a drunken chuckle, as he thought how the stranger was going to get fleeced.

The betting continued in the same way until finally there was nearly three thousand dollars on the table.

Then it was that Daring Dave began to grow uneasy.

It occurred to him that he might have made a mistake in dealing, after all.

So, after another bet was made by the Jerseyman, he "called" him.

"I don't know what in the dickens I have got," drawled Gates. "You ought ter know, Mister Inspector, you dealt 'em. Thunder! only a pair of deuces!"

The disguised outlaw held his breath as he lifted his cards. Then he turned as white as a sheet and drew his revolver.

He did not have a pair in his hand!

He realized that he had been beaten at his own game, but he meant to have the stakes, anyhow.

But before he could get his weapon on a level with Gates, it was knocked from his hand, and the cold muzzle of the Jerseyman's revolver was pressing against his forehead.

"I guess this belongs ter me, Mister Inspector!"

As the stranger spoke he scooped the money into his pocket,

and then, quick as a flash, tore the false beard from Daring Dave's face.

"I reckon you ain't what you seem!" he added. "But whatever you be, you must not think you kin fool a Jerseyman in any kind of fashion. How would a pair of bracelets fit on your wrists, mister?"

The outlaw captain was rendered desperate, and his one desire was to get away.

Regardless of the fact that he might receive a bullet in his brain, he made a flying leap and crashed through the window.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CLAIM IS STAKED.

The next morning, while Jeff Hope was waiting for some boards to be delivered from the sawmill, a mile or so beyond the Bar, Merle proposed that they should pay a visit to the Lost Lode, for such was the name they concluded to call their claim.

The old man was willing, and of course Race was, so the three set out, well armed and carrying a pick, shovel and ax with them.

"We are out prospectin', if any one asks," observed Hope.

"That is right," and the boy partners nodded.

"I wish Bill was like you boys," remarked the old man as they trudged along. "I am afraid that post office has been the ruination of him. All he does is to sit around an' play cards, an' I've smelled liquor on his breath more than once."

"He has a good position, hasn't he?" asked Race.

"Oh, yes, he gets a good salary, an' he ought to save lots of money, 'cause he's never been charged a cent for board."

"I guess he'll work around all right," said Merle, wishing to change the subject.

"Perhaps he will," was the rejoinder.

The walk to the gully where the lode of silver was located was not over half a mile, but it was uphill all the way, and consequently quite tiresome.

"This ground around here belongs to ther government," said Jeff Hope. "All's we've got to do is to stake off a piece of it, an' then it belongs to us until we are forced to buy it or get off."

"We had better stake up our claim as soon as possible; some one else might come along and find it, you know," exclaimed Race.

"We will jist as quick as we kin cut an' drive ther stakes," was the reply.

When the three reached the gully a surprise awaited them.

By some cause the roof of the little natural tunnel had caved in, filling the water course and turning the stream in another direction.

Race's jaw dropped when he saw this, and Merle laughed at him.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" he asked. "Don't you know this cave-in is the best thing that could have happened?"

"Why is it?" questioned the boy from New York.

"Because no peeping eyes can see what we know is buried in there."

"That is right." And Race gave a sigh of relief.

"Of course it is right. How would I know what's there if you hadn't told me?" chimed in Hope. "Now, then, we'll git to work an' cut some stakes from that group of scrub oaks, an' then we'll drive 'em in ther ground."

"We ought to have brought an ax apiece," said Race, as he watched the old man cutting away.

"Never mind," was the retort. "I'll do ther cuttin', an' you two can do ther drivin'."



It did not take him a great while to cut enough, and, one hour from the time they got there their claim was staked off.

"That is enough for to-day," cried Merle. "Now we own a claim at Diamond Bar, and we want to work it until our fortunes are made."

Before any one could make a reply a rifle shot rang out and a bullet whistled past the speaker's ear.

As quick as a flash they glanced above them whence the report came.

A faint wreath of smoke was ascending from behind a huge boulder, which rested on the very edge of the side of the gully.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a mocking laugh. "You can hear me, but you can't see me. At first I meant to shoot you down, but I have changed my mind, and I am going to crush you with this boulder!"

All three recognized the voice of the speaker.

It was Daring Dave!

The boulder was directly above them, and already they could see it moving.

A strange fascination held them rooted to the spot, and it seemed as if they were but waiting for death to come to them.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GATES TAKES A LOOK AROUND.

It was quite evident that Lemuel Gates did not anticipate the sudden action of his bewhiskered opponent, for he did not make a move until he landed on the ground outside of the building.

Then it was that the Jerseyman made a dart after him, but unluckily for him, his toe caught into the rung of a chair and he fell headlong to the floor.

Neither Bill Hope nor the miner made a move to interfere, but sat there the picture of astonishment.

By the time Gates got upon his feet the disguised outlaw had darted around the corner of the post office building and was out of sight.

After a few minutes' fruitless search about the premises he gave it up and went inside again.

"He's got away, but I've got ther ducats I won, anyhow," exclaimed Gates, coolly taking a seat in a chair again.

"You seemed to know the inspector—why does he wear a false beard?" questioned Bill, who had had a little time to think, and arrived at the conclusion that it would be wise for him to play the part of an innocent.

"I don't know him, if you don't," said Gates, laconically.

"I never saw him until to-day. He introduced himself as Inspector Jennings, and showed his authority to examine this office."

"He are a total stranger about these diggin's," added the miner, who had not seen the outlaw's face when the beard was torn aside.

The Jerseyman must have took it for granted that they told the truth, for he simply shrugged his shoulders and observed:

"Well, when any professional gambler tries ter down me I reckon he gits left. My! but I sorter scared him when I said somethin' about handcuffs on his wrists. I bet he's a genuine crook from Crookville!"

Bill breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am sure I don't know," was all he said.

"Say, which is ther best hotel ter put up at?" asked Lemuel Gates, after a rather lengthy pause.

Young Hope quickly told him, and, as the queer character started to go, asked him if he intended to remain long in Diamond Bar.

"I reckon I'll stay till I either make a fortune or git busted," was the reply. "I'm in for speculation, I am."

"I guess you'll be safe enough if you depend on playin' poker for a livin'," ventured the miner.

"Oh, I know lots of things 'sides playin' cards, even if I am a fool of a Jerseyman!" exclaimed Gates.

"I guess it is all over for to-day," said Bill to the miner, after the Jerseyman was out of hearing.

"Yes; well, I reckon I'll quit for a day or two, an' maybe it'll change my luck. Both of them strangers kin play all around sich as you an' me, an' I think we'd better let 'em alone."

"So do I," and Bill spoke as though he meant it.

Meanwhile Lemuel Gates walked slowly to the hotel to which he had been recommended, which was, in truth, the best in the place.

The wiry little man with the red hair engaged a room, and did not even remark that the exorbitant price charged was too much.

The new guest of the hotel went to his room very early that night.

It was quite evident that he was tired out, for he slept soundly till five o'clock the next morning.

After breakfast he tried to hire a horse, but found that to be a hard thing to do. So he purchased one out and out.

It was not a very good-looking animal that he bought, but one that was slightly raw-boned and very tough, and would stand as much riding as any of them.

"You'd better get a rifle and a six-shooter," suggested the landlord, as Gates mounted to ride off. "You're liable ter meet all kinds of men around these diggings, an' you might be robbed an' have your horse taken from you."

"I've got a revolver all right, an' I know how to use it, too, pop," was the reply.

The landlord looked as though he doubted the latter statement, but he didn't say so. Certainly Lemuel Gates did not have the appearance of being very good at anything, yet he proved himself more than a match for the disguised outlaw captain.

He sat rather awkward in the saddle when he started off, but in less than five minutes his body assumed that easy, almost careless position that only experienced horsemen have.

"I want to meet that fellow who jumped through the window," muttered the Jerseyman, as he entered the pass leading from the Bar. "He wasn't disguised for nothing, I'll wager. I'll just corner him up when I do meet him and find out just who and what he is."

Not knowing exactly where he wanted to go, he allowed the horse to suit himself about it, and the animal turned up one of the several mountain paths.

The higher he went up the rougher the path became, and Gates was just thinking about turning back when he heard the whinny of a horse close at hand.

Instantly the Jerseyman was all attention.

Dismounting, he tied his steed to a sapling, and then went softly forward on foot.

The next minute he came upon a fine bay horse tied to a scrub oak.

"Ah!" muttered Gates; "I wonder who is the owner of you, my fine fellow?"

The fact of the animal being tied there was sufficient proof that there was some one about, so the Jerseyman began to look around to see who it was.

Following a rocky path down the mountainside a few feet, he came to a ledge.

He was just about to step upon it when he heard a voice almost at his elbow.



It was that of Daring Dave, and he was talking to our three friends in the gully, and at the same time making an effort to dislodge the boulder so it would go crashing down upon them.

Lemuel Gates did not see those below, but he knew that by the way the man spoke there was somebody there.

The voice sounded familiar to him, too, but he could not place its owner just then.

But he was bound that the boulder was not going to be pushed over.

Already it was rolling back and forth, and it needed but one good push to dislodge it.

Like a cat Gates sprang forward and seized the unsuspecting outlaw by the collar.

One mighty jerk and he was lying on his back, with the Jerseyman standing over him, a leveled revolver in his hand.

"I guess not, Mr. Stranger!" exclaimed the Jerseyman, coolly.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BILL HOPE'S REMARKABLE SHOT.

Just at the very moment the boy partners and Jeff Hope expected to see the boulder come crashing toward them, it ceased rocking.

"Come!" exclaimed Race; "we must get out of the way!"

The spell was broken now, and a few hurried steps carried our friends out of danger.

Why had Daring Dave not pushed the boulder down upon them? That was the question they asked themselves.

"We must find that feller," said Hope, grimly, as they ascended from the gully, his keen eyes roving from object to object.

"He has either left the spot where he was, or is waiting there to ambush us," retorted Merle. "Be very careful now!"

The three were cautiously approaching the boulder.

Five minutes from the time they left the gully they were there.

But beyond a piece of rope lying on the ground there were no signs of any one having been there.

"Funny!" exclaimed Hope. "I don't know where the confounded varmint could have gone."

"And it is queer why he changed his mind about sending the boulder down upon us," added Merle.

"He is probably laying for us, so he can capture us," said Race, keeping a sharp lookout about him.

"I don't think he'll bother you much right away, gents!"

The next instant Lemuel Gates appeared from behind a rock, dragging the bound figure of Daring Dave after him.

"He came mighty near fixin' you fellers," went on the Jerseyman, as our three friends gazed at him in open-mouthed amazement. "But I happened along jist in time ter nip him in the bud. Who is he—does any of you know?"

"Yes," Race hastened to answer; "he is Daring Dave, the captain of the worst gang of cutthroats that ever breathed!"

"Pshaw! An' I caught him—me, Lemuel Gates, the speculator from the East! Now, the question is, what will I do with him?"

"Take him down to ther Bar an' we'll lock him up!" cried Jeff Hope. "We'll give you all ther help you want."

"Thank you, gents. We'll all go down together."

Fifteen minutes later they were filing through the pass, Daring Dave securely tied to his own steed.

The fellow had shaved off his mustache, and his hair was closely cropped, but this did not stop the cousins from recognizing his handsome, evil countenance.

He was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, as could be observed by the nervous twitching of his lips.

Neither of the four spoke a word to the villain on the journey

to Diamond Bar, but all hands kept a sharp watch for a surprise from his followers.

But none came, and a few minutes later Daring Dave was lodged in the lockup of the little town, which was built of heavy logs.

To say that the captain of the vigilantes was surprised when the noted outlaw was turned over to his tender care would hardly express it.

He could scarcely believe it was he.

But after scanning his face carefully he recognized him as the man he had known by the name of Morrow, and that settled it.

"Here is the gentleman who took him prisoner," said Merle, pointing to Lemuel Gates.

"Him!" exclaimed Jim Decker, bluntly; "why, mister, you don't look as though you had enough sand in you ter run an hour-glass fifteen minutes. But—great boots! seems ter me you resemble ther feller that wiped out ther post office inspector at poker, that Big Al was tellin' me about."

"I reckon I am that individual," returned the Jerseyman, grinning good-naturedly.

"Put her there!" and Decker held out his brawny hand.

Gates gripped it warmly, and from that hour the two were friends.

"May I ask what you are going to do with the prisoner?" Race ventured to inquire.

"We'll give him a fair trial, an' then string him up!" replied the captain of the vigilantes.

"That's square enough," nodded Jeff Hope.

Race was going to remark that he could not see the necessity of a trial, since it seemed to be a foregone conclusion that the man was to be "strung up," anyhow; but he concluded to remain silent on the subject. The ways of the inhabitants of the far West were decidedly peculiar, to say the least.

Shortly after Daring Dave had been confined in the prison Bill Hope came upon the scene.

His face was pale when his father told him that the noted outlaw was at last in the toils.

"Are you sure it is he?" he asked of his father. "You might have the wrong man, you know."

"I guess I know Morrow when I see him," was the retort. "He is caught hard and fast, an' he'll wear a rope necktie inside of twenty-four hours, or I don't know what I am talking about!"

His son shrugged his shoulders uneasily at this remark.

"You don't appear ter like ther idea of ther rascal bein' hanged?" said Lemuel Gates, gazing keenly into the eyes of Bill.

"Who says so?" was the petulant reply; and the postmaster took a step forward.

"Bill," exclaimed his father sternly, "don't you go and make a fool of yourself by pickin' a quarrel with Mr. Gates. Jist mind your own business!"

Without another word the young man walked away.

Both Race and Merle thought there was something on his mind, and they wondered if he wasn't a trifle friendly toward the outlaw captain.

"Ther trial will take place arter dinner," said Jim Decker, a few minutes later. "I'm ther judge, an' I'll soon get a jury that'll do ther thing right. You people must be around an' give testimony."

Punctually at the appointed time the judge and jury took their places in the room adjoining the bar in the largest shanty hotel, and the prisoner was brought in.

As many as could squeeze in were present in the "courtroom," and the boy partners and Jeff Hope were among the number.



Lemuel Gates had been appointed to take charge of the prisoner, and he attended to that duty like a veteran at the business.

Of course the trial that followed was a mere farce. The vigilantes were bent upon hanging the villain, and when the foreman of the jury announced the verdict of "guilty!" half a dozen of the miners rushed for a rope.

They were going to hang him for two reasons. One was because he was the leader of the gang of cutthroats that preyed upon travelers to and from Diamond Bar, and the other because he had taken Millie Hope from her home by force.

Taking into consideration the fact that a horse thief suffered the penalty of being hanged in that section, the verdict of the jury was right and proper.

Anyhow, the honest residents of the Bar thought it was, and they set about making preparations for the execution.

Race Neville knew that the outlaw captain no doubt deserved his fate, but he felt that he had not had anything like a fair trial.

But he knew that anything that he might say would make him unpopular, and besides, it would not do the least good.

Being born and brought up in a wild country, Merle thought differently.

"We don't have to look at the hanging," he said to his cousin. "When Daring Dave is once planted under the sod his gang will be broken up, and we will be allowed to work our claim without the fear of being shot down at any moment. I am satisfied that we would be in a peck of trouble all the time if the scoundrel were at large. If he killed the former owner of the Lost Lode because he would not tell him where it was located, he would not hesitate to rob and slay us."

"You are right," nodded Race. "Come, let us get away from here."

The boys started in the direction of the post office, and, reaching that building, Race acted on a sudden impulse and peeped in the window.

The next minute he placed his finger on his lips and beckoned his companion to his side.

Bill Hope was seated at a table engaged in the strange occupation of drilling a hole through a bullet in a rifle cartridge.

Why he was doing it the boys could not imagine; and a minute later, when they saw him attach a lead slug to the bullet by means of a piece of copper wire about three inches long, they were more puzzled than ever.

They waited until they saw him load his rifle with the cartridge and slug, and then they softly left the spot.

Meanwhile the vigilantes were ready to proceed with the hanging in a little square less than two hundred yards distant from the post office.

Almost every man in the place was gathered about the spot, and, becoming fascinated, the boys could not remove their eyes from the rope that had been thrown over the limb of a convenient tree.

Two minutes later the body of Daring Dave shot into the air, his hands flying about like a windmill in his desperate efforts to clutch the rope to save himself from being strangled.

A deathly stillness came over the crowd, which was broken the next instant by the crack of a rifle.

Astonished beyond measure, Race and Merle saw the rope part, and then, before they could bring themselves to believe what had happened, they beheld the form of the outlaw captain appear from behind a shanty, fleeing for dear life.

Then it was that they thought of the bullet and slug Bill Hope had joined together with the wire.

It was he who had saved the life of Daring Dave!

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A DUEL.

When the rope to which the outlaw captain was suspended snapped asunder the vigilantes stood as if rooted to the spot.

It was such an unexpected thing that they were astounded.

Every one in the crowd had heard the report of the rifle, and naturally the eyes of those first to recover themselves turned in the direction it came from.

"The post office window!" cried a keen-eyed miner; "I see the smoke curlin' upwards!"

Everybody else tried to catch a glimpse of the smoke, and by the time they had turned their heads again Daring Dave had gained his feet and started to make a run for his life.

Scarcely fifteen seconds had elapsed since Bill Hope placed the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, yet in that short space of time remarkable things had occurred.

That Daring Dave was not to be hanged that day was plainly evident, for he gained the cover of the shrubbery on the mountainside before a shot was fired at him, and then there was not one chance out of ten of his being overtaken, as he knew the mazy and intricate paths too well to allow himself to be recaptured.

Race and Merle joined in the pursuit at first, but when they reached the mountainside they gave it up.

They walked back to the tree from which the severed rope still hung, and they could but agree that the shot that did the business was a remarkable one.

And they resolved to say nothing of what they knew concerning it.

Bill Hope's sisters were too beautiful to be disturbed by any crime he committed, and his father and mother were as fine people as ever lived.

That is the way the boy partners of Diamond Bar argued it.

They knew it was quite likely that the young postmaster would be suspected, but that was no affair of theirs, and they could not help it.

"I wonder where Mr. Lemuel Gates is?" remarked Race, as they turned their steps toward the post office, where quite a crowd had collected.

When they got there they found Bill Hope explaining how he had just started to witness the hanging when he heard the crack of a rifle and saw a man dart around the corner of the post office building.

"Thinking the office had been robbed, I started in pursuit of the fellow, but failed to overtake him," he added.

"Did you recognize who this feller was?" asked one of the vigilance committee.

"I am not quite certain, but I think it was the stranger who calls himself Lemuel Gates," was the rejoinder.

"The liar!" muttered Race, under his breath. "I have almost a mind to tell what I know about the shot."

And Merle was of a similar opinion; but before either of them could make up their minds which course to pursue the Jerseyman appeared on the scene.

One of the vigilantes immediately pounced upon him and seized him by the collar.

The result was that the next instant a quick blow from the fist of Gates sent him on his back to the ground.

"Keep your hands off me, gentlemen," exclaimed the wiry little man. "I didn't come out West ter git in any trouble with honest men. Now just wait a minute. The postmaster is trying to insinuate that it was me that fired the shot that cut the rope. Is there any one here to say I didn't?"



There was no reply, though our two young friends felt like speaking.

"No one to prove that I didn't," went on the Jerseyman, coolly.

"Well, I'll tell you all that I didn't, an' I know who did!"

"Who—who?" roared the crowd.

"The postmaster!"

"You lie!" cried Bill Hope, drawing his revolver and springing forward.

"Drop that!" said Gates, sternly, as he flashed his own revolver on a level with the young man's breast.

"I am glad old man Hope is not here to see this," whispered Merle to his cousin.

"So am I," was the reply. "To use one of the expressions of this part of the country, there is apt to be a funeral in the Hope family before many hours."

Meanwhile Bill stood glaring at his accuser, his face as pale as a sheet.

He had allowed his pistol to drop to the ground, and in a voice that was a trifle shaky he said:

"Drop your pistol and we will meet on an even footing. I am going to make you take back what you said."

"That's right!" yelled Big Al, the miner. "Fight it out with knives, an' ther feller that wins will prove that 'twas t'other that shot ther rope in two!"

"Good!" shouted the crowd.

"Give 'em room, boys!" sang out one of the vigilantes. "This are ther only way ter settle ther dispute."

Lemuel Gates tossed his revolver aside and drew a keen-looking knife from his belt.

"Come on," said he quietly. "I am satisfied to do it any way that pleases the crowd."

A hearty cheer greeted this remark, which showed that the Jerseyman had lots of friends in the crowd.

Bill Hope was of athletic build, and was a first-class shot and an expert with a bowie-knife.

He was going to make the fight of his life and slay his accuser, for, if it became known that he had been the means of liberating the outlaw captain, he would be compelled to leave the Bar—that is, if he was allowed the opportunity.

These were the thoughts that flashed through his mind as he stepped forward to meet the speculator from the State of New Jersey.

"Ready!" cried Big Al. "Let her rip!"

The knives clashed together and the fight was on.

With distended eyes the cousins watched it.

At first they thought it would be of long duration, but a moment later their minds were changed. Lem Gates knocked the knife from his opponent's hand and sent him to the floor. It looked as if he meant to stab him, for he bent over him with upraised knife.

At that moment Rosy Hope appeared.

"Spare my brother!" she cried.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE MAIL COACH IS HELD UP.

Daring Dave lost no opportunity to get away from the spot. He did not know who it was that severed the rope and saved his life, nor did he try to ascertain.

His one idea was to escape, and the instant he fell in a heap to the ground he sprang to his feet and was off like a flash.

When he once reached the wildness of the mountainside he was safe, and by dint of hiding and running alternately he at length reached the secret entrance to his retreat.

The outlaw captain was jubilant. It occurred to him that he must bear a charmed life, and he felt so good over his remarkable escape that he ordered a keg of whiskey to be tapped.

He did not regale his followers with what had transpired until he had drank several bumpers, and then he took the floor and gave a glowing account of the proceedings.

Concluding, he said:

"A small-sized cyclone has struck Diamond Bar in the shape of a red-haired little man, who calls himself Lemuel Gates. He is by far a worse enemy to us than the boy we had here. I want you all to be on the lookout for him and not underestimate him."

"I am not afraid to meet him on equal conditions!" exclaimed a young Englishman, who had deserted his ship at San Francisco a few months before. "I never saw the man I was afraid of!"

The bulldog expression of the man's face was ample proof that he was a tough customer, and it was quite evident that he was one of the sort who would die fighting.

Daring Dave scowled fiercely at the fellow. The Englishman was the most independent of any of the band, and he did not like him for that.

"So you are not afraid of any one, eh, my young Johnny Bull?" the captain coolly observed as he drained another glass of whiskey.

"That is what I said, and I'll stick to it," was the sailor's retort.

"Don't you think you are talking a little too fast?"

"I always say what I think, and talk whenever I feel like it."

"You do, eh? Well, suppose I should tell you to shut up, would you do it?"

"No!"

"What?" roared Daring Dave, drawing his revolver; "you would dare to disobey my command?"

The fiery Englishman's blood was now up.

As quick as a flash he drew his revolver, and then without a word glared at the outlaw captain, who was dreaded so much by the other members of the band.

Daring Dave could have shot the fellow down at the start; but he did not anticipate such a thing as his drawing a revolver, too, so he stood with the muzzle of his shooter directed at the floor.

For a few seconds a deathly stillness reigned in the cave.

Then the Englishman spoke.

"Daring Dave, we will see who is boss of this gang, you or me!" he exclaimed.

These audacious words nearly took the breath away from the assembled outlaws, although they could but admire the pluck of the sailor, and drawing back on either side of the underground retreat, they anxiously awaited the result.

The outlaw captain had now regained his usual coolness.

"Prepare yourself to step out!" he cried.

Almost at the same instant two reports rang out, so close together that they were blended into one.

The Englishman dropped to the floor, shot through the heart, and Daring Dave remained standing!

A satisfied smile flitted over his face for a moment, and then, with a sweeping glance, he exclaimed:

"Is there any one else who has such an opinion as that poor fool had?"

There was no reply to this, but finally one of the men yelled out:

"Three cheers for the captain, boys!"

A deafening cheer rang out and Daring Dave acknowledged it by doffing his hat.

"Remove the carcass!" he commanded.



Half a dozen of the villains flew to do his bidding, and a minute later the grewsome object was tossed through a crevice, to go crashing into the depths of a chasm.

"Fill up once more, men! After that not another drop until to-morrow morning; there is work for us between now and that time. The mail coach leaves the Bar at daylight."

"And there must be lots of stuff aboard," added one of the men.

"Sure! Some of the miners have struck it rich lately, and they are sending lots of money home," said the villainous captain.

By this time it was nightfall. The man who cooked for the gang brought out the supper, and all sat down to it.

Daring Dave had a tin plate nailed to the table in the place the Englishman had usually occupied, and with a piece of chalk he inscribed the word "Traitor" upon it.

More cheers went up at this act, and the captain felt that he now had his followers under perfect control.

After the meal pipes were lighted, and an hour later all hands retired, save the man on guard.

At three o'clock Daring Dave aroused them.

"Get ready," he said. "All hands will go save the cook, who will stay here to watch the place and have breakfast ready when we return."

Half an hour later the outlaws were leading their horses out through the secret exit.

All wore black masks, and Daring Dave was only distinguished by a red plume in his hat.

Down the mountainside the villainous band made their way, and when the pass was reached they galloped to the other side of the range.

Day was breaking now, and when the outlaws came to a halt in a secluded spot the sun was just beginning to show its face above the line of the horizon.

"The coach will be along shortly now," observed Daring Dave. "I got information that it was going to make an early start because there is so much money in the mail bags. Ha, ha, ha! I will get square on some of the hounds who were so anxious to string me up yesterday!"

Patiently the masked band waited, and after a while the rumbling of a vehicle could be heard.

It was the mail coach.

"Get ready!" whispered the outlaw captain.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and presently the coach came in view.

The outlaws peered through the trees and saw that there were no passengers, but that a man sat on the box with the driver, with a rifle in his hands.

"He is guarding the mail," said Daring Dave, with a little laugh. "Well, I guess I'll pick him off, so he won't do any harm."

He drew his rifle to his shoulder, and taking deliberate aim, pressed the trigger.

Crack! The man dropped from the box to the ground and the driver reined in the horses.

Then the outlaws came dashing from their cover and surrounded the stagecoach.

"Hands up, driver!" came the stern command. "Refuse and you'll die!"

There was nothing for the driver to do but to obey, so he very wisely dropped the reins and lifted up his hands.

A couple of the masked men held the horses by their heads, and while the rest covered the driver with their revolvers, Daring Dave clambered inside the vehicle.

The moment his eyes lit upon the mail bags he seized upon them.

As he lifted them up the figure of a man was disclosed huddled in the bottom of the coach.

Before the outlaw could say anything he arose to a sitting posture.

It was Bill Hope, the postmaster!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WORKING THE CLAIM.

It was not at all likely that Lemuel Gates intended to take the life of Bill Hope, but the attitude he struck made the lookers-on think so.

And every one of them—even to the young man's sister—felt that he was justified in doing so.

But blood is thicker than water, and when Rosy sprang forward and appealed to the Jerseyman to spare the life of Bill, he stepped back with a smile and placed the knife in his belt.

A cheer went up from the crowd at this action, and when the defeated young man arose to his feet and followed his sister into the post office, Gates turned to the crowd and exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, I reckon you are satisfied that it wasn't me who fired ther shot that clipped ther rope?"

"Yes—yes!" cried the miners in a chorus.

"I want you all ter understand that I came out here ter do good, instead of evil," the Jerseyman went on. "It was me that collared ther skunk of an outlaw an' brought him here, as you all know; so it couldn't possibly be me ter let him git away. Now I'm goin' ter hunt Daring Dave up ag'in, an' inside of forty-eight hours I'll fetch him back here. See if I don't!"

"Hurrah for ther Jerseyman!" yelled Jim Decker, who appeared on the scene just then, after a fruitless search for the outlaw captain.

Race and Merle joined the crowd in cheering, and then, after the captain of the vigilantes had made a little speech, the miners began to leave the spot.

Not one of them liked the idea of leaving the postmaster to go about free, for they were satisfied in their own minds that it was he who had been the means of causing Daring Dave's escape.

"It looks bad for Bill Hope," observed Merle. "If the miners get full of whiskey and get it in their heads that he ought to be lynched, they will do it."

"I hope nothing of the kind will happen, for the sake of the family he belongs to," replied Race.

The boys' fears were not entirely without foundation. By the time darkness set in the miners were "celebrating" in fine style, and many of them talked in a very ugly fashion of the postmaster.

The cousins remained about the hotels to find out the outcome, and if necessary put Bill on his guard.

After a while one of the prominent members of the vigilance committee suggested that a meeting should be called to settle upon the postmaster's case.

The suggestion was favorably received, and in a very few minutes a judge and jury were selected to decide it.

The verdict, which was rendered very quickly, was that Bill Hope should be given twenty-four hours' notice to get out of Diamond Bar, and that his father, or one of his sisters, should take his place as postmaster until one was appointed by the government.

Jim Decker wrote the notice himself, and then delivered it to Bill.

"That isn't so bad, after all," said Race. "It ought to be a



lesson to the fellow, and the chances are that it will be the means of making him reform."

"That's so," returned Merle. "There are plenty of places in the world besides Diamond Bar where Bill Hope can make a living, though he will have to go a long way before he strikes the sinecure he had here."

As soon as young Hope got the notice he closed up the post office and went home.

His mother was very much agitated over his banishment from the place by the vigilantes, but his father only shook his head.

"It is no use in kickin' agin' what ther wigilantes do," said he; and then, in a whisper to his wife, he added: "'Tain't wery often they make a mistake, my dear."

It was decided by the family that Millie and Rosy should assume the cares and duties of the post office, as the vigilance committee would guarantee them protection from the rougher element of the Bar.

The mail coach was to leave the next morning, shortly after daylight, and Jeff Hope instructed his disgraced son to assist the girls in putting up the mail, and then leave in the coach.

Race and Merle went with them to the office when the time came, and, sure enough, when the vehicle started with the mail bags, containing over a thousand dollars in money, which the miners were sending to their relatives, Bill Hope was aboard.

"See here," said old man Hope to the boys, after they had returned to the house and eaten their breakfast, "do you know it strikes me that it won't be safe to leave your claim alone?"

"I've been thinking that way myself," Merle answered.

"What is the matter with building a shanty and living there?" spoke up Race.

"That's what we'll have ter do!" exclaimed Hope. "I've started ter build on this one, but that won't make any difference. Mrs. Hope and ther girls can live at ther post office, an' I can git ter see 'em every day. There is only one thing about it—we've got ter git ther silver out of that lode without any one knowin' that we've struck a big find."

"Suppose we get at it right away?" the cousins suggested.

"We will."

Matters were soon arranged, and by noon Mrs. Hope and her daughters were installed at the post office, and her husband and the boy partners had pitched a tent on the ground where the Lost Lode was located.

They intended to build a shanty at their leisure and work the silver vein for all it was worth.

Jeff Hope owned a team of mules and a heavy wagon, and these, together with their horses, were brought to the claim.

The boys were pretty well tired out when night came, and as they were to pass the night in the tent, they tried to make things as comfortable as possible.

Hope kept the fire burning brightly and smoked and chatted with his young companions on all subjects save the banishment of his son from the Bar.

About nine o'clock, when the moon had risen, Merle was struck with the idea of going up to the top of the cliff and taking a look at Diamond Bar by night.

"I'll confess that I am too tired to do any climbing to-night," said Race. "But you can go on, only do not go beyond our hearing."

"Oh, I can take care of myself all right," was the rejoinder.

"Look out for them outlaw fellers," cautioned Hope. "They might be around these diggings."

"I guess they won't bother us any more. Daring Dave ought to be satisfied to leave well enough alone," said Merle, as he started up the ascent.

His friends watched him until they saw him come to a halt near the bowlder the outlaw captain had so nearly crushed them with.

They had been careful to pitch their tent where it would be out of harm's way, even if the heavy stone did come rolling into the gully.

From where Merle stood he had an excellent view of the collection of huts below.

The distance to them was less than a quarter of a mile in a straight line, but to get there required a journey of over a mile.

While Merle was standing there taking in the scene he heard some one cough behind him.

Like a flash he turned about, his hand upon the butt of his revolver.

"Hello, Merle, it is I—Bill Hope!" said a voice in a low tone. "I want you to do me a favor."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE JERSEYMAN'S PATIENCE.

Lemuel Gates did not linger about the shanty hotels after he had eaten his supper.

He was bent upon capturing the outlaw captain again, and he meant to do it if it was possible.

For some reason he started on foot immediately after darkness set in, taking with him a small bundle.

When he reached the seclusion of a clump of bushes on the mountainside he stopped and untied the bundle.

If it had been light enough to see, a long-tailed coat would have come to view, but Gates did not seem to care whether any one saw it or not. He coolly put it on, and then took off the crop of red hair that covered his head.

A wig! that was all it was.

"I'll take the part of Dead-eye Bill from Black Range," the Jerseyman muttered. "This coat will make me look a little queer, but the rest of the make-up will be all right."

The red wig was stowed away in an inner pocket, and a dark-brown one, mixed with gray, with a full beard to match, was fished out.

In a very short space of time Gates had donned these articles of disguise.

A huge slouch hat was next produced, and then a large, greasy-looking leather belt.

The latter was buckled on outside the coat and a brace of ugly-looking revolvers and a knife with a blade fully twelve inches long were thrust in it.

To say that the man would have looked "bad" if he walked into a lighted barroom would be putting it mildly.

"I guess I'll do now," chuckled Gates; "now for this here Daring Dave's hangout!"

He must have had a good memory, for in a half hour's time he stood on the spot where he had made the outlaw captain a prisoner not many hours before.

"If I kin find what I am looking for between now an' mornin' I'll consider myself lucky," the disguised man muttered. "Now, which is ther right way ter go, I wonder? S'pose I'll have ter trust ter luck."

With the slouching gait of a half-drunken man he started up one of the paths that circled the mountain peak.

For over half an hour Gates walked about from one path to another, and at length becoming tired, he halted and sat down on a bowlder.

Before he had a chance to do any ruminating he was startled by the sound of distant cheering.



At first he thought it came from the miners in the valley below, but a second thought convinced him that it did not.

By the time the "three times three" had been given he made up his mind that the men who were doing the shouting were very near him.

Their voices appeared to be muffled, much like the sound that comes when a person shouts down a coalhole.

"I've struck ile, I reckon," observed Mr. Lemuel Gates, when silence reigned once more. "Ther gang of outlaws are in a cave around here somewhere, as sure as I am alive! I'm goin' ter lay around here until I set eyes on somebody, an' that settles that!"

Patience must have been a virtue with the Jerseyman, for he picked out a good hiding place and remained there for two solid hours without so much as complaining.

He had not heard a sound since the cheering to give him the least encouragement that a human being was about.

But this did not matter with him. He was sure there was, and he was willing to wait.

Another hour slipped by, and another, and the situation remained just the same.

"I'd take a nap if I thought I dared risk it," mused the disguised man. "However, I reckon I kin stand it till daylight."

Gradually the night wore away. Gates never left the spot, though occasionally he would change his position.

At length he fell into a doze in spite of himself.

But it was not over a minute's duration, for what he had been waiting for so long had come at last.

He heard voices talking in low tones.

And the owners of the voices were in the open air, and not under the ground!

Instantly the Jerseyman was wide awake.

Peering cautiously from his hiding place, he beheld a number of masked men in the act of mounting their horses.

And not twenty feet from him he saw an opening in what he had believed was solid rock.

A man was just coming from it leading a horse.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Gates softly crept to the spot.

He arose to his feet almost in the midst of the horsemen, but it was so dark that they did not notice that he was not one of their number.

It was a daring thing to do, but Lemuel Gates was given to doing daring and unexpected things.

Like a shadow he moved directly into the opening.

He was not an instant too soon, for the next moment the place was closed with a thud.

A stone door had swung shut, and Lemuel Gates was inside the outlaws' retreat.

A foolish move for him, some might say, but he did not think so.

It was as dark as a pocket in the place where he was, but he did not attempt to light a match.

He waited until he was sure the band had gone, and then the daring man placed his hands upon one of the side walls and began feeling his way cautiously along.

A few feet ahead he suddenly saw a streak of light coming through a crack.

"That must be the door," he muttered. "Now for a peep inside."

In another minute he had placed his eye to the crack.

What he saw was the interior of the outlaws' den.

As the reader knows, all the members of the band, save one, went out to hold up the mail coach.

It was the cook who remained, and he was just preparing to take a little nap before he got breakfast ready.

The Jerseyman tried the door softly.

It yielded.

Drawing his revolver, he rushed in, with the idea of overpowering the man.

But as the door swung back a bell jingled somewhere, and the outlaw sprang to his feet, revolver in hand.

Crack! The moment he saw the newcomer was not a member of the band he fired at him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WHAT GATES LEARNED.

At the very instant the outlaw discharged his revolver Lemuel Gates slipped and fell to the floor.

That was all that saved his life, for the bullet struck some rough woodwork near the door on a line exactly where his head had been.

As it was, the villainous guard thought he had surely killed the intruder, but as he stepped forward he held his shooter ready to discharge another shot.

The Jerseyman lay just as still as death, though his hand still clutched his revolver.

He was a man who, unquestionably, possessed great presence of mind. He knew it was a matter of life or death to him now, and he resolved to live!

When the outlaw was within six feet of his prostrate body his right hand flew up, and simultaneously with it his revolver cracked.

So quickly did he fire the shot that he scarcely knew whether he had the man covered or not.

As it happened the bullet took effect in the man's right wrist, and he dropped his pistol with a howl of pain.

One second later and the wiry little man from New Jersey was on his feet.

"Shut up!" he exclaimed; "make another bit of noise and you are a dead man!"

It was surprising to see how quickly the wounded outlaw became quiet. He knew when he had the worst end of it, and he was not going to rush matters a bit.

"Who are you?" he ventured to inquire, in a tone that showed signs of great uneasiness.

"I'm Dead-eye Bill, from Black Range," was the quick reply. "I wasn't born to stand any foolin', so you had better do jist as I tell you."

"How did you git in here, anyhow?"

"I walked in through a kind of door or somethin'."

"You did?"

"Yes, I certainly did."

"Was the door open?"

"Sure it was."

"I can't understand it."

"You don't seem to like my comin' in here."

"No one has a right here unless I know him."

"Well, you kin git acquainted with me in short order if you want ter," and Gates walked a step nearer and thrust the muzzle of his revolver under the fellow's nose.

"No—no!" cried the outlaw; "I don't want to git acquainted with you in that way."

"You tried to shoot me."

"Ye-es, I'll admit that I did."

"An' I am a citizen of this county who has lived on bullets and grub for ther past two days—principally bullets."



"I can give you all you want to eat, if you are hungry," and a ray of hope crossed the face of the rascally cook.

"I'd like ter have somethin' ter eat an' a good horn of whiskey."

"I'll get both for you right away."

"Hold on! I'm afraid you might pizen me. Jist tell me where ther stuff is an' I'll git it myself."

"See here," said the guard, who now believed his visitor was fully as much of a rogue as himself, "if you are what you say you are, and want to join a gang that is makin' lots of money, I'll put you on it."

"How?" questioned Gates.

"I'll let you out, and then meet you at one of the ginmills of the Bar about four hours from now."

"And what then?"

"I'll bring you back here and vouch for your bein' a good man, and you'll be taken in as a member of the band."

"Are you sure they would take me in?"

"When a member proposes a man, and the man stands the test, he is bound to be taken in."

The Jerseyman had been weighing in his mind whether the villain was in earnest or not, and he came to the conclusion that he was.

It struck him that making a pretext of joining the vile gang would be the best way for him to get his clutches on Daring Dave.

"All right," said he; "I'll do as you say. I've had hard luck lately, an' half a dozen deputy sheriffs are after me. I've done considerable killin' in my time, an' I'm ready ter do some more."

"You'll do!" exclaimed the outlaw. "Here! jist see how bad my wrist is hurt; it seems ter bleed pretty good."

"It is only a scratch; you can say your revolver went off as you were about to clean it."

"Yes, that will do. I'll let you out, Mr.—"

"Dead-eye Bill, from Black Range."

"Oh, yes! Well, Mr. Dead-eye Bill, from Black Range, I'll let you out, an' four hours from now I'll meet you in ther saloon opposite ther post office, which buildin' you kin tell by a flag floating over it."

"All right; I'll put trust in what you say. If you go back on me, though, jist look out! I'm a bad man!" and our disguised friend shook the revolver he still held in his hand.

"I believe you," was the truthful reply. "Wait a minute and I'll get some whiskey."

Gates sat down on a bench as unconcerned as though he belonged there.

A minute later the outlaw produced the liquor and he took a light drink of it.

Then he arose, and after telling the man to be sure and keep his word, asked to be conducted outside.

"You must not mention that you was in here before when you come in ter join," cautioned the guard as they parted.

"You kin depend on it that I won't," was the retort.

After the secret door of the retreat had been closed upon him, Lemuel Gates stood and pondered a moment.

He was making up his mind whether to hide around somewhere and wait till the outlaws came back, or go on down to the Bar.

At length he decided on the former. There might be such a thing as the friend he had just made going back on him; so it would be better for him to learn all he could about the headquarters of the band.

It was now daylight, and not knowing just how soon the cut-throat gang might return, our wiry friend began looking about

for a good place where he could lie low and see without being seen.

The place where he had been for the best part of the night was about as good as any, so he crept into it and prepared to put in another long wait.

An hour passed.

Then his ears were greeted with the unmistakable sounds of approaching hoofs.

The Jerseyman remained as quiet as a mouse and watched.

Soon the gang of masked riders came into view.

They halted close to the secret door in the rock, and then one of their number dismounted and made a careful tour of inspection of the near vicinity.

Everything being all right, the door swung open at a tap from the butt of the captain's pistol.

When they had all filed inside, and closed the door behind them, Lemuel Gates uttered a chuckle.

"It would be dead easy to lead ther vigilance committee here an' then blow that stone door off its hinges with dynamite; but I ain't goin' ter do it jist yet."

He cautiously crept from his hiding place, and a minute later was making for the village below in order to keep his appointment with the outlaw cook.

Lemuel Gates was not quite sure that the outlaw would keep his appointment, but he hoped he would, and at the proper time he walked into the saloon that had been specified.

In his rather curious costume the Jerseyman created no little comment as he walked up to the bar and ordered a drink.

Many remarks were passed—some of them not very nice—but he paid no attention to them.

Just as he laid down the money for the drink a man stepped up to his side.

It was the outlaw! Gates knew him the instant his eyes fell upon him, though the fellow had changed his appearance somewhat.

The men exchanged greetings, after which drinks and cigars were ordered.

The outlaw seemed to be pretty well known in the saloon, and as soon as they saw he was a friend of the stranger with the long-tailed coat the loungers ceased passing remarks.

It was still quite early in the morning, and some of the miners had merely stopped in the saloon to get a morning drink before proceeding to their work.

Jim Decker, the captain of the vigilance committee, dropped in, and good-naturedly invited all hands to partake of their "pizen," as he called it.

But before the stuff could be poured out the mail coach, which had departed some hours before, dashed up in front of the post office.

"Great boots!" cried Decker, "what in thunder does this here mean?"

The return of the mail coach was so unexpected that, to a man, the miners rushed out of the door.

"I've been held up!" exclaimed the driver. "Poor Luke is inside, dead as a mackerel! Daring Dave and his gang did it— took ther mail and collared Bill Hope, who was riding with me ter git out of town, accordin' ter orders!"

At this juncture the Hope girls came running out of the post office.

"Don't git nervous, gals," said the captain of the vigilantes. "It is bad luck, that's happened to ye on your first takin' charge of ther office. But don't mind it; you ain't ter blame. Don't worry over your brother; 'tain't likely ther outlaws will hurt him."



"Come!" whispered the outlaw in the ear of Gates; "we'd better light out."

Though he would have liked to hear the full account of the hold up, the Jerseyman thought it best to humor the man, so the two left the rapidly-gathering crowd and started up the mountain.

In due time they reached the retreat, and, true to his promise, the outlaw introduced "Dead-eye Bill," who stood the test and was duly installed as a member of the band.

Lots of exciting things were in store for the Jerseyman.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DARING DAVE IS ASTONISHED.

One of Lemuel Gates' first discoveries on being admitted into the outlaw retreat was that Merle was a prisoner, bound hand and foot.

He had been led into a trap by Bill Hope, who had only pretended to wish to speak to him to give Daring Dave a chance to surround him.

Of course Daring Dave's object in seizing Merle again was to discover the location of Lost Lode.

Merle stubbornly refused to say anything about it.

Of course he did not recognize Gates in his disguise as Dead-eye Dick, and he was greatly surprised when one of the outlaws in passing shoved into his hand a piece of crumbling stone with the following words written on it:

"Keep up your courage. There is a friend near."

He crumbled this into dust, allowing it to drop on the floor.

"I don't know where the Lost Lode is," he said to Daring Dave, who had approached him to question him.

"I am going to make you tell the truth," cried Dave. "I am going to lower you into a pit beside the traitor I shot yesterday, and leave you there until you tell me where the Lost Lode is."

Every boy has, more or less, a horror of a dead person, and Merle was no exception.

When Daring Dave told him that he was to be lowered into a deep pit that was already occupied by the corpse of an outlaw traitor, he shuddered in spite of himself.

"If you will tell me where the Lost Lode is you will not have to go down there; if you won't tell me you will be lowered down and kept there until you get ready to tell," said the captain.

Merle shook his head.

"Down with him, boys!"

A rope was immediately tied about the lad's body below the arms, and then he was dragged to the other end of the cavern.

The disguised Jerseyman was present, but he did not have a word to say. He followed the rest of the men to see the boy disappear.

With a "one, two, three!" Merle was lifted up and pushed over a wall of rock.

Then the two villains who had hold of the rope began paying out upon it.

It must have been a pretty deep pit, for fully seventy feet of the rope had run out, and the bottom was not reached.

Daring Dave was just going to call for another piece of rope to tie on to the end when Merle was landed at the bottom of the pit.

"Make it fast, with room enough for him to move eight or ten feet," the captain said. "He won't be likely to cut the rope, for if he does he will lose all chances of getting out. From what I know of it the pit is a blind one, with a subterranean stream running through it. It is raining outside now, and when the stream begins to swell it is more than likely the body of the traitor will be washed away."

When the rope had been fastened to his full satisfaction Daring Dave walked away and took a seat in his accustomed place.

Lemuel Gates was playing his part to perfection. He had been questioned over and over again by the captain, and his answers had proved satisfactory.

All the daring man was waiting for was to find out all about the hidden retreat, and then lead the vigilance committee there and bag the entire band.

But just now Gates had something else on his mind. He was studying out a plan to save Merle Baxter, for he was quite sure Daring Dave would kill him in case he refused to impart the desired information.

He resolved that the boy should not be harmed under any consideration.

He might imperil his own life by preventing it, but that was nothing to such a man as Gates. He had run so many risks in his time that he had become hardened to danger.

Presently he walked over to Bill Hope, who was seated on an old box, apparently in a despondent mood.

"What's ther matter, young feller? You seem ter be down in the mouth about somethin'," said he.

"Oh, I'm all right," replied Bill, with a forced laugh. "Only I ain't so much thought of by the people of Diamond Bar as I used to be. I was postmaster there, you know."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Gates.

"Yes, that is a fact. How do you suppose the mails would have been robbed so often if it hadn't been for me? I owed the captain a whole lot of money, and I've been paying him off by putting him onto the heavy mails that went out."

"Well, you are a good one," and the supposed Dead-eye Bill looked upon the young man with affected admiration.

"If I hadn't taken to rum and gambling I wouldn't be what I am," said Bill Hope, half musingly.

"We'd all be good if we'd never been bad," the Jerseyman answered. "But, do you know"—and he lowered his voice to a whisper—"I believe an honest life is the best."

"So do I," exclaimed Bill, bitterly. "No one knows that better than I. I'd like to reform if I could."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Gates. "You haven't a will of your own, and so you've got ter be a willain all your natural life."

He walked away as he said this, knowing that it would furnish the disgraced young man food for thought.

"There is some good in that fellow yet," the Jerseyman muttered. "I believe I will try and reform him, just for the sake of his folks."

Gates made it his business to get acquainted with every man in the band, and a few minutes' conversation with each convinced him that there was but one man besides Hope who would like to lead a better life.

This fellow was an Irishman named McCoy. He had left the East, after committing some petty offense, and had drifted from bad to worse, until finally he fell in with Daring Dave.

The Jerseyman made friends with this man almost as soon as he became installed as a member of the band, and he determined to use him before he got through the business he had undertaken.

After a while the Jerseyman walked over to the man who held his fingers on the rope with which Merle had been lowered into the pit, as though he were fishing and expected a bite.

"Don't the young feller want to come up yet?" he asked.

"No," was the reply; "he ain't moved ther rope a particle."

"Got lots of grit, ain't he?"

"Lots."

"I wonder how long ther captain will keep him down there?"



"Till he rots, if he don't signal that he wants ter come up an' tell what was asked of him."

"I don't think——"

Gates was cut short in the remark he was about to make, for at that moment there came a sharp jerk upon the rope.

"Go an' tell ther captain that ther boy wants ter come up!" exclaimed the outlaw, excitedly.

"All right," and the Jerseyman started off.

He found Daring Dave instructing a couple of his men in the art of card playing.

"Cap, ther boy wants ter come up," said he.

"He does, eh?" was the rejoinder. "I thought it was pretty near time he came to his senses. I'll be right there. Don't haul him up till I do get there."

Gates walked back and reported to the man in charge of the rope.

How he could manage to save the life of the boy our disguised friend did not know.

One bad move on his part might cause him to lose his own life.

And yet he was bound that Merle Baxter should not be slain.

Pretty soon Daring Dave came over to the spot.

"Haul him up!" he commanded.

Gates sprang to the assistance of the man, and they rapidly pulled upon the rope.

"He are a pretty heavy boy!" panted the outlaw.

"You're right," said the Jerseyman.

A minute later a human head came in view.

"Now, up with him!" cried Daring Dave.

Exerting themselves, Gates and the outlaw reached down and seized the pair of arms that were apparently waiting for them, and landed their burden on the rocky floor of the cavern.

Then it was that a simultaneous cry of surprise left their lips.

It was not Merle they had hauled from the pit, but the body of the dead outlaw that had been thrown there!

## CHAPTER XX.

### A HAPPY MEETING.

Meanwhile Race had gone out on a hunt for his cousin after Merle had been gone from the Hope cabin for some time.

He wandered about the hills for nearly an hour, and when he saw a storm coming up he decided to retrace his steps.

To his surprise, he found that he had lost his way, and he was hurrying on in the direction in which he thought the Hope cabin must lie when the ground suddenly gave way beneath his feet and he went sliding down the steep side of a hill on which he had been walking.

Down—down went Race, the howling wind and driving rain of the storm that had now come on drowning the cry of horror that left his lips.

That he was descending to certain death the boy felt sure, and the whole history of his past life flashed through his brain in a second.

But, no! Race Neville was not to die just then. A Divine Providence interfered in his behalf.

In exactly two seconds from the time the dirt gave way beneath his feet his falling body struck the top of a tree.

It was a thick-limbed pine, and its brittle branches snapped beneath his weight the moment he touched them.

He settled, with scarcely any shock, into a lower fork of the tree, and there he remained, breathless and speechless, for the space of fully half a minute.

"Whew!" he at length exclaimed. "I thought I was gone, sure, that time. I wonder how far I fell, anyhow? This is what

I get for fooling around on the mountain after dark. I wonder if Merle is back to the camp yet? My! but isn't it raining, though?"

When Race had relieved himself of these thoughts, he shifted his position and started to descend the tree.

A lightning flash showed him that the tree grew up from a narrow gorge, which was a strange place to him.

The boy slid down the trunk and landed upon the solid ground below.

Beyond a few scratches and a general shaking up, he was as good as ever.

But he was no better off, as far as finding Merle, or his way to the camp, was concerned.

He was soaked to the skin by this time, but, notwithstanding this fact, he crawled under a ledge to escape the violence of the thunderstorm.

The plucky boy had not been under shelter over five minutes before he heard the noise made by a landslide not far from him.

"I guess I'll get out of here," he muttered. "The first thing I know I will be buried alive. This is the hardest I ever saw it rain in my life, and it is raising the dickens."

Race stepped from beneath the ledge and stood unprotected in the rain.

But he soon noticed that it was slacking up. The thunder and lightning had died out, and it was quite evident that the storm was about over.

Ten minutes later it had ceased entirely.

"Now I guess I'll move on again!" exclaimed the New York boy. "I'll follow this ravine till it fetches me out somewhere."

A stream of water flowed through the place, and it was now swollen to about three times its usual size.

Race walked along its edge for a few feet, and then he came to a pile of loosened dirt and stones.

"This must be where the cave-in took place," he thought. "Well, I'll climb over the top of the pile and go on."

In another minute he had reached the top of the pile.

He found that the side of the gorge had fallen out—that is, a part of it ten or fifteen feet in diameter had.

The mouth of a cave was before him.

While Race stood there endeavoring to pierce the inky blackness of the interior he was startled by the sound of footsteps.

And the sound came from the cave, too!

The boy felt for his revolver, but found that he had lost it.

What could it mean? The mouth of the cave had apparently been there but a few minutes, and yet there was some one in there already.

Nearer and nearer came the slow, measured tread.

Race crouched in a niche and waited to see who it was.

The next minute a flickering light flashed up.

Whoever was inside the cave had struck a match.

Race shaded his eyes to get a good look at the person.

Then he uttered a cry of joy and sprang to his feet.

If his eyes did not deceive him his cousin stood before him!

"Merle—Merle!" he cried, rushing forward.

"Race!"

Then the two boys fairly hugged each other with delight.

"How came you here?"

"How came *you* here?"

"You tell me your story first. I have been hunting all over for you, and came very near breaking my neck."

"Well," said Merle, "I've had quite an adventure. I was captured by the outlaws, and because I would not tell the captain where the Lost Lode is I was lowered into a pit by the side of a dead body."



"You don't mean it?" Race gasped.

"Yes, I do."

And the boy related just what had taken place.

"And they think you are in the pit yet?"

"Yes; if a whole lot of dirt had not caved in and filled up a stream of water that flowed through the pit I would be there yet."

"That made a way for you to get out, then?"

"Yes; if you found your way here from the outside I can surely get out."

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Race, after a pause.

"What?" questioned his cousin.

"We will go back into the pit and tie the end of the rope around the body of the dead man, so if Daring Dave orders you to be pulled up he will receive a surprise."

"It is rather a grewsome job, but I am with you."

"Lead the way, then."

Back through an irregular passage went Merle, and close behind him came Race.

In less than two minutes they were in the pit.

A match was lighted and the body of the outlaw was disclosed half covered with dirt.

Race grasped the rope and tied it about the body.

Then, not being able to resist the temptation, he gave a smart pull on the rope.

"Come!" he whispered, "we will get away from here as quickly as possible."

Through the passage they hurried, and soon they were in the open air.

"Which way do we go?" asked Race; "I have not the least idea."

"We will follow the ravine down this way. What we want to do is to get as far away from the outlaws' place as possible."

For half an hour the young partners made their way along.

It was tedious work, too, for there was plenty of climbing to be done over big boulders and stones.

At length they came to a halt, because they could go no farther in that direction.

The gorge ended in the form of a letter V.

"There is only one thing for us to do, and that is to wait until daylight!" exclaimed Race, taking a seat on a stone.

## CHAPTER XXL

### TO FIGHT FOR THE POSSESSION OF MILLIE.

It was a tedious wait, but there was nothing else for the boys to do; so they settled themselves in as comfortable a position as possible, to remain until the first streaks of the coming day should show in the east.

Race's clothes were wet, but it would not have been safe to build a fire to dry them, and then again, they could not have found any wood dry enough to light.

All things come to him who waits, and at length day broke.

"As soon as it is light enough we will strike out," said Merle. "I know which direction our camp is from here now."

"So do I," Race answered. "But after the moon went under last night I was all at sea."

"Let us get out of this confounded gorge first, and then we will be all right."

"Providing we do not meet with any of those villainous outlaws; neither of us is armed, you know."

"Well, we won't borrow any trouble; we have enough on our hands now," and Merle started resolutely down the gorge in search of a place to climb out of it.

Luckily for them, they found one in less than five minutes, and

in a very short time they were following a rocky path in the direction of their claim.

But the natural path they were following was a winding one, and, as there was no other way to go, they were forced to keep to it.

Just as the sun got above the horizon they reached a spot that they recognized.

"Race, we are all right now!" exclaimed Merle. "Our camp is less than a quarter of a mile distant."

"You are right," was the rejoinder. "I— Look there!"

He pointed straight ahead to the approaching form of a young girl:

"It is Millie Hope!" gasped Merle.

Sure enough, it was. The fair girl recognized them at once, and came bounding forward to meet them.

She was armed with a rifle and a brace of revolvers, and looked very pretty in her neat hunting costume.

"So I have found you!" she cried. "Where in the world have you been?"

"Merle went out and got captured by Daring Dave, and I went out to look for him and tumbled over a precipice; then we met," said Race, as he took the girl's proffered hand.

"Father came to the Bar shortly after midnight and reported that you were missing," said Millie. "So about an hour ago twenty men, under the lead of Jim Decker, started out to look for you. We all thought, of course, that the outlaws had captured you."

"And you came out to join in the search?" asked Race.

"Yes, I came out on my own hook, prepared to shoot the first outlaw I met."

"You are running a big risk, coming up here," spoke up Merle.

"You are right she is, young fellow!"

The words were spoken so close to them that our three young friends were dumfounded.

They could scarcely believe their senses when they beheld three masked men, with leveled rifles, not a dozen feet distant.

Their unexpected meeting had made them oblivious to the approach of the three masked men, who were no other than Daring Dave, the Jerseyman and the fellow called McCoy.

Of course the partners and their girl friend thought they were all outlaws, and they gave themselves up as lost.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Daring Dave, sneeringly. "You see my turn comes once in a while!"

"I have never been beaten by you yet, and I do not propose to be now!" returned Race, spiritedly. "You are nothing but a cowardly villain, and I tell you plainly that inside of twenty minutes you will be a prisoner!"

Just why the boy said this he did not know. At any rate, it so exasperated the outlaw captain that he raised his rifle to send a bullet through his heart.

"Stop!" cried Millie, jumping in front of Race. "You may kill me, but not him!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the villain, lowering his weapon. "So, my pretty one, you think more of the young upstart than you do of me—your intended husband! Well, that gives me an idea. We will fight for your hand, the winner to take you with him. What do you say?"

"I agree to your proposition," quickly replied Race, "if you will let me choose the weapons."

"Certainly," and Daring Dave gave vent to a laugh. "You have got to die, anyhow, so you may as well have a show for your life. I can best you easily with any weapon you may name, and you ought to know it."

"Say that you are willing that we should fight it out right here.



I will surely win," Race whispered to Millie, who was still standing in front of him as a shield.

"I ought to have a word to say," spoke up the girl, her flashing eyes turning to the outlaw captain. "You say that the one who wins takes me; do you mean to stick to that?"

"I do," was the retort.

"Then I am satisfied for you to fight it out right here."

Merle looked at the girl with admiring eyes. Never before had he seen such nerve displayed by a woman.

And he could not imagine why Race preferred to fight Daring Dave, with only one chance out of a hundred of winning, to being taken a prisoner.

"Perhaps he is talking this way to gain time and give the vigilantes a chance to come along," he at length concluded.

At that moment one of the outlaws raised his mask a trifle, and he saw that it was the man who had handed him the piece of stone in the outlaw's den.

A thrill shot through the frame of Merle.

There was a chance of getting away yet, perhaps.

That man claimed to be his friend, and if he was he could aid them greatly.

But it was too late to stop Race from fighting with the captain. The villain agreed to Millie's proposition, and turning to the boy who defied him, told him to hurry up and name the weapons.

"The weapons shall be those that Nature has provided us with—our fists!" said Race.

"It will take too long to kill each other that way. You must select revolvers or knives. Hurry up, now."

"We will fight it out with our fists," repeated Race. "I will leave it to your men if it is not square."

"It certainly is, cap," spoke up Gates, and McCoy nodded to show that he agreed.

Daring Dave did not like this decision, but he did not want to go back on his word before his men, so he signified his willingness to fight it out with fists.

"Hand over your knife and shooters to your men!" cried Millie. "Race hasn't anything but a knife, and I'll take charge of it until the thing is settled. Your men can keep me covered so I can't interfere."

"As you say, my beauty," and the confident villain passed over his weapons to the disguised Jerseyman, and then pulled off his coat.

"This is to be a fight to the finish," said Race, grimly, and he tossed his coat to Merle. "Do you understand it that way?"

"Yes, and I am going to break your neck with my fist," was the retort.

"Are you ready?" sung out Gates.

"Yes," came the answer from the outlaw captain and the athletic boy who stood facing him.

"Let her go, then!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

ALL O. K. AGAIN.

As Lemuel Gates cried "Let her go!" the outlaw captain made a vicious pass at Race.

But the boy neatly parried it and landed a light one on the villain's nose.

Merle caught the Jerseyman's eye, and the two exchanged winks.

It occurred to both of them that Race was going to prove himself altogether too quick for Daring Dave.

Of course the blow he received angered him somewhat, but the

outlaw captain was still confident of easily besting his youthful opponent.

And, on the other hand, Race was equally confident that he would not.

Born and reared in the city of New York, where scientific boxing almost comes natural to boys, he knew lots about the manly art that Daring Dave never dreamed of.

And when another blow was aimed at him and missed, he smiled.

"You must not do it that way," he said. "I'll show you how," and a swinging uppercut sent the villain flat upon his back on the grass.

"This is to be a fight to the finish," said Gates, with a meaning look at the young New Yorker.

As Race was not aware that the man was a friend he knew not how to take this remark.

"It is going to be a fight to a finish," he remarked, and then turning to the fallen captain, he added:

"Get up, sir! Preserve your dignity, and do not recline upon the grass when there is fighting to be done."

Daring Dave had now lost his temper.

He scrambled to his feet and made a furious rush at the boy, hoping to seize him about the body.

But he was badly mistaken.

Race jumped nimbly aside, and then, with all his strength concentrated in one blow, he landed on the outlaw captain's neck.

Down went Daring Dave for the second time!

This time he did not attempt to rise, but lay as still as death.

He was insensible!

"Pretty good!" exclaimed Gates, and then, stepping forward, he drew a piece of rope from his coat pocket and proceeded to tie the unconscious villain's hands behind his back.

Race and Millie were astounded at this move, though Merle nodded as though he expected something of the kind would happen.

The other member of the band watched what was going on uneasily, and it was not until his companion had finished his task that he spoke.

"I guess you people can be after goin' on about your business," he observed, addressing our three young friends.

"Very well," returned Race. "We thank you, I am sure."

"Taint necessary," said Lemuel Gates. "Ah! here comes a crowd of the miners. Jist see that this feller is taken care of, will you?"

Then the Jerseyman and his companion darted from the spot just as the vigilantes, with Jim Decker at their head, put in an appearance.

"What is this?" cried the captain of the vigilance committee, coming to a halt from sheer astonishment. "As I live, boys, here are ther two young fellers we've been looking for."

"That is right," returned Race; "we are here, alive and well, and we have got the leader of the outlaws here for you to take charge of."

"You don't mean it!" said Decker.

"But we do, though!" exclaimed Millie. "There is the villain hard and fast."

She pointed to the defeated outlaw's form as she spoke.

"Great boots! they've got him sure enough, boys."

Daring Dave had come to by this time, and he strained his neck to see who the strange voices belonged to.

He was somewhat dazed from the effects of the blow he had received, but he was not long in coming to his senses when he saw the strangers about him were miners.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JERSEYMAN ENTERTAINS THE MINERS.

He made a powerful effort to free himself, but it was useless. Lemuel Gates and his companion had made a good job of it.

"We won't say anything about who tied the villain," Race whispered to Merle and Millie.

His cousin nodded, and then, turning to the vigilantes, he told them of the fight between Race and the outlaw captain.

"An' so, Mr. Daring Dave, you sorter got ther worst of it, I reckon," said Jim Decker, turning to the prisoner. "You fought for ther gal, hey? An' ther boy won! I wonder is ther gal satisfied? How about it, miss?"

"Of course I am satisfied," was Millie's blushing reply.

"But Daring Dave'll have a bride just ther same," the miner went on. "Death'll be his bride, an' there'll be no danger of his ever gittin' a divorce, either. He's got on his weddin' suit now with ther 'ception of ther necktie, an' we'll furnish that in double-quick time as soon as we get inter town. Come on, boys! We'll strike out for Diamond Bar, ther biggest place for its size this side of ther Mississippi!"

The vigilantes broke into a rousing cheer at this, and then all hands started down the mountain path, Daring Dave being pulled along in the center.

The outlaw realized that he was in a bad box, but he did not give up hope.

He had been within an ace of death when the vigilantes tried to hang him before, but he had made his escape, and why shouldn't he this time?

These thoughts lent him courage, and he showed no signs of being uneasy.

In a very short time our friends reached the post office, and found Rosy Hope there in a great state of agitation.

But when she saw her sister and the boys back safe and sound, she uttered a cry of joy.

"Where is your father?" Merle asked.

"You will probably find him somewhere in the neighborhood of the claim," was the reply.

"We had better go out there at once, then," suggested Race.

"Not until you have eaten a good breakfast!" exclaimed Mrs. Hope, who appeared on the scene at that moment.

It took but little persuasion on the part of the females to make the cousins stay.

Both were hungry and pretty well exhausted from the want of sleep.

It was their intention to get to their tent in the gully and lie down for a couple of hours.

They were quite sure that Daring Dave would be executed by the miners this time, but they did not want to be around when the hanging took place.

While they were waiting for their breakfast Jim Decker came along and informed them that they had decided to wait until noon to launch the outlaw captain into eternity, as they were in hopes Lemuel Gates would show up by that time.

This just suited the boys, as they knew they would be at their camp when the execution took place.

After they had eaten a hearty breakfast Merle and Race set out for the Lost Lode.

"There is one thing I would like to know," said the former, as they trudged along the rugged mountain path, "who is that outlaw who took such an interest in me, and why did he go back on the captain?"

"We will probably learn all about it a little later," replied his companion.

"You are right you will, my boys!"

Lemuel Gates stepped from behind a boulder, still attired in the "Dead-eye Bill" disguise!

"Hello!" exclaimed Gates, as he faced Race and Merle. "What did you do with ther captain?"

"The vigilance committee are taking charge of him," retorted the boy from New York. "He is to be hanged at noon."

"He is, hey?" and the Jerseyman gave a start. "I wonder if they'll fix him this time?"

"You talk and act rather queer for an outlaw," ventured Merle.

"Mebbe I do; you can't tell who's who nowadays, you know."

"That's so," and Race gazed at him curiously.

"Mebbe I might be an outlaw, an' then I might be only plain Dead-eye Bill, from Black Range; and mebbe I might not be either," went on the disguised man.

"You are a good one, whoever you are."

"I'm glad you think so."

"We have reason to think so."

"Very well, boys, I can't stop you from thinking. Good-morning!"

The Jerseyman left the boys standing in the path and made his way in the direction of the settlement below.

When he was well out of their sight he paused for a moment, and then entered a clump of bushes.

Three or four minutes later he had changed his appearance, and once more he was plain Lemuel Gates!

"Now I'll go down to take charge of ther hangin'," he muttered. "Though it ain't exactly right, I suppose that scoundrel of an outlaw has got ter be executed without a trial. I know he is well deserving of it, so I shan't lose any sleep over his death."

Gates walked leisurely into the Bar and dropped into the hotel, where he had a room.

"I've been out prospectin' or somethin' else," he said in answer to the clerk's look of inquiry. "I s'pose my room is still at my disposal?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "Guests are mighty scarce in Diamond Bar. That's why we charge so much."

"A good way of gittin' square," laughed the Jerseyman.

"We won't have dinner until one o'clock to-day on account of ther hangin'," said the fellow as the guest started for his room.

During the next half hour Lemuel Gates busied himself writing a letter, which he sealed and took over to the post office.

He had a few minutes' conversation with the Hope girls, who assured him that the letter would go all right, as the outlaws would not be likely to hold up the mail-coach since their leader was gone.

"Now then, I'll wait around till ther hangin' takes place," he muttered. "I wouldn't be much surprised if Bill Hope tries to save him again, although it strikes me that ther young feller has had enough of doin' bad."

Presently he met the captain of the vigilantes, who was so glad to see him that he almost shook his hand off.

"Jist ther man I want ter see!" exclaimed the big miner. "Ther boys have concluded to have a little celebration in honor of ther doomed outlaw captain. We want you ter make a speech, sing a song, or somethin'. Will you do it?"

"I guess I kin accommodate you on somethin'," returned Gates, good-naturedly. "I'll sing a song, an' then give you a little exhibition in ther sleight-o'-hand line."

"Good! Daring Dave is locked in a room without a winder in it, an' a man's on guard at ther door all ther time. We'll string him up at ther wind-up of our doin's. I've given an order for fifty dollars' worth of whiskey, an' ther boys will chip in an'



patronize ther bars when that's gone. Won't we have a hot time, though!"

The Jerseyman said he reckoned so, and then followed Decker to the center of the square, where already quite a crowd had collected.

As the reader knows, Gates was an adept at handling cards. He could deal them any way he wished and do several tricks with them.

As there was not a miner in Diamond Bar who did not know what playing cards were, he concluded to show them some sleight-of-hand with the pasteboards.

Going about through the crowd, he managed to place half a dozen cards on the persons of as many men, and he remembered what card each one was and where it was placed.

To do what he was going to do required an excellent memory, and that was one of Gates' accomplishments.

He took his seat near the rudely-constructed platform on which two miners were standing ready to give a song and dance after Jim Decker had made a short address.

The address was a rather short one, and dealt mostly with Daring Dave, but all hands voted it a good one.

When the cheering had subsided the song and dance took place, and the miners were tickled immensely.

The next thing on the programme was a grand march, in which those of the men who cared to went around in single file and partook of a drink of liquor from a tin cup.

When this was over shouts for the Jerseyman were heard, so he mounted the platform.

He rendered the song of "Jersey Sam" for them in really good style, and received a thunderous applause.

They would not think of letting him go at that, so he sang two more songs, and then managed to escape from the platform.

"Gentlemen," yelled Jim Decker, "Big Al will now recite the piece called 'The Tramp,' and then Mr. Lemuel Gates will charm you with some sleight-o'-hand tricks. After that we'll git ready for ther combination rope an' air dance!"

A few minutes later Gates took his place on the platform, attired exactly as he had been when he first struck the town.

"Gentlemen," he observed, holding a pack of cards up to view, "I suppose you all know what these here things are?"

"Oh, yes!" came the unanimous rejoinder.

"Well, I'll pass them around an' let you all have a look at them," and he did so.

"Now I want to borrow a six-shooter and six blank cartridges. I am goin' to show you how I am at shootin' cards."

There was no blank cartridges in the company, but the bullets were soon drawn from the needed quantity.

The Jerseyman got one of the miners to load the revolver with them, and then selecting a card from the pack, he held it up to view.

"You all know the card, gentleman," he called out.

"Yes, it are ther queen of clubs," the captain of the vigilantes hastened to reply.

"Well, I'll twist it up an' put it in ther barrel of ther shooter, an' then you jist watch me."

He apparently did as he said, and the crowd awaited to see what was coming next.

Suddenly Gates leveled the pistol at a miner in the center of the crowd and pulled the trigger.

As the report rang out the Jerseyman cried:

"That man has the card in his left trousers pocket; I just shot it there!"

A wild yell of wonder and delight went up the next minute. Sure enough, the queen of clubs was found in the man's pocket!

"You can't do that again!" cried the puzzled Jim Decker.

"Oh, yes I can," was the modest retort. "I'll shoot the whole six chambers off, an' a card'll go just where I aim ther pistol."

He proceeded to do so, and was successful in each case.

Just then it occurred to him to do something which, if successful, would cap the climax of all tricks in the minds of the rough men about him.

The six extra cards he had used he had found on the floor beneath the table Daring Dave played on in the retreat, and he had seen the outlaw put the rest of the pack in his pocket.

This happened the night before, and it was pretty certain the villain had the cards on his person yet.

"Which is ther shanty Daring Dave is in?" he asked.

"That one right over there," said the vigilantes' captain.

"All right. You all remember what the six cards were I shot among the crowd?"

"Sure!"

"I've got mine yet," added a miner, holding it up.

"Very well. I am going to throw the balance of the pack into one of Daring Dave's pockets. I am going to do it right from this platform, but they will go so swiftly through the air that you won't be able to see a single card. Ready now! Here they are—now they are gone!"

The cards had certainly vanished, and a second later the men made a rush for the outlaw's prison.

The fellow on guard unlocked the door, and Jim Decker stepped forward to open it.

"I'll see if Daring Dave has got them cards!" he exclaimed.

He opened the door.

A howl of astonishment left his lips.

The room was empty!

Daring Dave had vanished as mysteriously as the cards had disappeared from the Jerseyman's hand!

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THREE SKELETONS AND THREE PILES OF GOLD.

As they expected, the boy partners found Jeff Hope at the camp in the gully.

He was seated on the bank of the stream that flowed through the center of their claim and lost itself underground, and appeared to be very much dejected.

"Hello!" called out Merle from the top of the bluff.

The old man started as if he was shot.

At first he could scarcely believe his eyes, and it was not until they were nearly at his side that he found words to speak.

"Where—where have you been?" he faltered.

Merle hastened to tell him all about it in as few words as possible.

"So all that has happened since you left camp last night? It hardly seems possible!"

"But it is, nevertheless," spoke up Race.

"I gave you up as having been murdered by the outlaws, but it was some time before I reported you missing and urged the vigilantes to look for you. I went about on the mountain myself for a while, but got downhearted and came back here."

"Well, as everything is all right, and Daring Dave is to be hanged at noon, we can start in at work with a little more confidence," said Race.

"After we have had a couple of hours' sleep," put in Merle.

"There is dry straw in the tent; go in an' take a nap. I'll call you at noon!" exclaimed Hope.

The boys needed no urging to do this, and ten minutes later they were sound asleep.



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Going about through the crowd, he managed to place half a dozen cards on the persons of as many men, and he remembered what card each one was and where it was placed.

To do what he was going to do required an excellent memory, and that was one of Gates' accomplishments.

He took his seat near the rudely-constructed platform on which two miners were standing ready to give a song and dance after Jim Decker had made a short address.

The address was a rather short one, and dealt mostly with Daring Dave, but all hands voted it a good one.

When the cheering had subsided the song and dance took place, and the miners were tickled immensely.

The next thing on the programme was a grand march, in which those of the men who cared to went around in single file and partook of a drink of liquor from a tin cup.

When this was over shouts for the Jerseyman were heard, so he mounted the platform.

He rendered the song of "Jersey Sam" for them in really good style, and received a thunderous applause.

They would not think of letting him go at that, so he sang two more songs, and then managed to escape from the platform.

"Gentlemen," yelled Jim Decker, "Big Al will now recite the piece called 'The Tramp,' and then Mr. Lemuel Gates will charm you with some sleight-o'-hand tricks. After that we'll git ready for ther combination rope an' air dance!"

A few minutes later Gates took his place on the platform, attired exactly as he had been when he first struck the town.

"Gentlemen," he observed, holding a pack of cards up to view, "I suppose you all know what these here things are?"

"Oh, yes!" came the unanimous rejoinder.

"Well, I'll pass them around an' let you all have a look at them," and he did so.

"Now I want to borrow a six-shooter and six blank cartridges. I am goin' to show you how I am at shootin' cards."

There was no blank cartridges in the company, but the bullets were soon drawn from the needed quantity.

The Jerseyman got one of the miners to load the revolver with them, and then selecting a card from the pack, he held it up to view.

"You all know the card, gentleman," he called out.

"Yes, it are ther queen of clubs," the captain of the vigilantes hastened to reply.

"Well, I'll twist it up an' put it in ther barrel of ther shooter, an' then you jist watch me."

He apparently did as he said, and the crowd awaited to see what was coming next.

Suddenly Gates leveled the pistol at a miner in the center of the crowd and pulled the trigger.

As the report rang out the Jerseyman cried:

"That man has the card in his left trousers pocket; I just shot it there!"

A wild yell of wonder and delight went up the next minute. Sure enough, the queen of clubs was found in the man's pocket!

"You can't do that again!" cried the puzzled Jim Decker.

"Oh, yes I can," was the modest retort. "I'll shoot the whole six chambers off, an' a card'll go just where I aim ther pistol."

He proceeded to do so, and was successful in each case.

Just then it occurred to him to do something which, if successful, would cap the climax of all tricks in the minds of the rough men about him.

The six extra cards he had used he had found on the floor beneath the table Daring Dave played on in the retreat, and he had seen the outlaw put the rest of the pack in his pocket.

This happened the night before, and it was pretty certain the villain had the cards on his person yet.

"Which is ther shanty Daring Dave is in?" he asked.

"That one right over there," said the vigilantes' captain.

"All right. You all remember what the six cards were I shot among the crowd?"

"Sure!"

"I've got mine yet," added a miner, holding it up.

"Very well. I am going to throw the balance of the pack into one of Daring Dave's pockets. I am going to do it right from this platform, but they will go so swiftly through the air that you won't be able to see a single card. Ready now! Here they are—now they are gone!"

The cards had certainly vanished, and a second later the men made a rush for the outlaw's prison.

The fellow on guard unlocked the door, and Jim Decker stepped forward to open it.

"I'll see if Daring Dave has got them cards!" he exclaimed.

He opened the door.

A howl of astonishment left his lips.

The room was empty!

Daring Dave had vanished as mysteriously as the cards had disappeared from the Jerseyman's hand!

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THREE SKELETONS AND THREE PILES OF GOLD.

As they expected, the boy partners found Jeff Hope at the camp in the gully.

He was seated on the bank of the stream that flowed through the center of their claim and lost itself underground, and appeared to be very much dejected.

"Hello!" called out Merle from the top of the bluff.

The old man started as if he was shot.

At first he could scarcely believe his eyes, and it was not until they were nearly at his side that he found words to speak.

"Where—where have you been?" he faltered.

Merle hastened to tell him all about it in as few words as possible.

"So all that has happened since you left camp last night? It hardly seems possible!"

"But it is, nevertheless," spoke up Race.

"I gave you up as having been murdered by the outlaws, but it was some time before I reported you missing and urged the vigilantes to look for you. I went about on the mountain myself for a while, but got downhearted and came back here."

"Well, as everything is all right, and Daring Dave is to be hanged at noon, we can start in at work with a little more confidence," said Race.

"After we have had a couple of hours' sleep," put in Merle.

"There is dry straw in the tent; go in an' take a nap. I'll call you at noon!" exclaimed Hope.

The boys needed no urging to do this, and ten minutes later they were sound asleep.



"Won't they be surprised, though," mused the old man. "I would have told them of my discovery before this, but I knew they were in need of sleep."

He walked over to the point where the lode began, or rather where it showed itself nearest to the surface, and after looking cautiously about to make sure that no prying eyes were watching him, lifted a flat piece of stone.

He was forced to place one foot at the very edge of the swollen stream to do this, and it took no little effort to accomplish it.

An opening amply large enough to admit the body of a man was disclosed, and into this Jeff Hope crawled unhesitatingly.

Six or eight feet through a sort of natural tunnel and he emerged into a cavern that ran many feet toward the very heart of the mountain.

"Whoever would have dreamed of this?" he muttered, shaking his head. "I reckon this is the greatest discovery that has been made in a hundred years."

As he concluded his remark he lighted a torch which looked as though it had been burning but recently, and was lying right at hand, and arose to his feet.

The dull, flickering light made by the torch illumined the cavern but for a small space, but where it showed upon the side walls a glittering sheen of silver fairly dazzled the old man's eyes.

"The wealth of a kingdom!" he cried in rapture. "If what is in here was turned into money a man could not spend it if he lived for a hundred years!"

The further he walked the wider the cavern became, until at length the side walls could not be seen.

Suddenly the old man's foot kicked against something, and looking down he was horrified to see that it was a human skull!

"Heavens!" he gasped, "some one has been here before me, and they never got out!"

When he had somewhat recovered himself he knelt closer to the ground, and beheld the entire skeleton of a man.

But that was not all! Near it was another, and another!

It seemed to Jeff Hope that he had entered a veritable silver tomb.

He turned from the skeletons and walked a few feet further.

Then a cry of surprise left his lips.

On a square slab were three piles of golden nuggets—aggregating at least two million dollars, according to Hope's judgment.

"Three skeletons and three heaps of gold," he mused; "and in a cavern of silver at that. Could anything be more wonderful? I thought my discovery of the cavern alone was the greatest wonder of years, but this does beat all!"

"It does, Jeff Hope!"

The words rang out so close to him that the old man started as though he had been stricken by a bullet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed a mocking voice; and a dark form emerged from the darkness of the tomb-like place and faced Jeff Hope.

It was Daring Dave, the outlaw!

His revolver was pointed directly at Hope's breast, and, by the manner in which his eyes flashed in the uncertain light made by the torch, there was murder in his soul at that moment.

"How—how did you get here?" gasped Hope. "I thought you were to be strung up at noon?"

"So I was—if I had stayed in Diamond Bar. But I didn't stay," and the villain gave a fiendish chuckle.

"I am glad I happened along in time to see you crawling through a hole," he went on. "I followed you, and I've found the Lost Lode by doing so! Jeff Hope, just imagine how happy your daughter Millie will be as my bride, with all this gold and silver to spend! Think of it, man! I—Morrow, the man who

ruined your son and made him a thief, an outlaw like myself. I am Daring Dave, the richest man on the face of the globe! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fiend!" cried Hope, his voice trembling with excitement.

"The bones of three unfortunate devils lie before us in ghastly array," the outlaw continued. "These three piles of gold no doubt belonged to them when they were alive, and after that to the fool I killed while trying to wrest his secret from him. He was too superstitious to touch a bit of the gold, but he did not know enough to stop speaking aloud his thoughts to himself. I knew this place existed, but could never find it until to-day. I am much obliged to you, Jeff Hope, for showing me all these riches."

While talking, Daring Dave unconsciously lowered his revolver.

But Hope did not seem to notice this. He stood as immovable as a statue, in the same position as when the outlaw faced him.

What was passing through the old man's mind would have been difficult to imagine by the expression on his countenance.

His eyes glared like those of an angry bull, but there was something that looked the least bit like a smile playing about his lips.

"Morrow," said he, slowly, "you had better go out of this here place and never think of coming in it again, or ever mention the fact that you have been here. What's in this cavern belongs to me an' ther two boys outside in ther tent."

"Outside in the tent!" almost shouted Daring Dave. "Do you mean to tell me they are there? What a fool I was not to look inside! After bribing a man to let me go from the clutches of the vigilance committee by paying him four thousand dollars in cold cash, and then having the extraordinary luck of finding the coveted Lost Lode, the two boys I hate like poison are free, and within a few yards of me, to balk me again! It shall not be, Jeff Hope! It shall not be!"

Daring Dave must have become crazed for the minute, for he began to walk about excitedly, calling himself all sorts of names for not looking into the tent before crawling into the hole in the wake of Hope.

As he stated, he had bribed his jailer to set him free.

The man on guard was an honest miner, but he was getting ready to go to his wife and children in Missouri, and the offer of four thousand dollars was too tempting for him to resist.

He gave the villain his liberty while Lemuel Gates was holding the attention of the crowd.

The outlaw caught sight of Jeff Hope, who was just in the act of removing the stone slab from the entrance to the cavern, and, creeping down into the gully, cautiously followed him inside.

It occurred to him that he had at last found what he had been looking for so long.

And so he had!

As the villain began to walk about the cavern in his excitement the voice of Jeff Hope suddenly rang out like a clarion.

"Hands up, Daring Dave, or I'll drop you on the spot!"

Hope had recovered himself, and now had the drop on the villain.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE WALKING SKELETON.

"It is my turn now!" cried Jeff Hope, exultantly. "Daring Dave, you will never leave this cavern alive!"

The strange, unusual expression on the old man's face told plainly that he meant what he said.

"The silver and gold in this cavern belongs to me an' ther two boys outside," he went on. "You tried a long time to find ther Lost Lode, but couldn't do it, even after you killed the poor fellow who owned it."

"See here," returned the outlaw captain, gazing at the muzzle of the revolver that was pointed at his heart, "we had better make a compromise, Jeff Hope. You have the drop on me, but you wouldn't shoot me down in cold blood. Let me go out, and I promise you I will never bother you or your friends again."

Instead of softening, a glance of extreme fierceness shot from the eyes of Hope.

"You have bothered me and mine too much already; but you never will again. I am going to kill you, Morrow! Then I will drag your body out and deliver it to the committee at the Bar. Do you hear what I say?—I'm goin' to shoot you through the heart, and rid the world of one of ther worst villains that ever lived in it!"

Some few minutes had elapsed since the two men had entered the cavern, and the light Hope had brought with him was growing rather dim.

No one knew this better than the outlaw, and he was doing his best to keep Hope from shooting, hoping all the while that the light would soon go out and leave them in total darkness.

"Make me a prisoner if you will, Jeff Hope, but you are not justified in shooting me," said Daring Dave, nervously watching his foe.

"Not justified, hey? I'll show you! I'll bore your heart——"

A crashing noise, intermingled with a dull roaring sound, interrupted Hope. It was instantly followed by a shock, and——

The light went out!

Jeff Hope discharged his revolver.

But the bullet passed through the empty air and flattened out upon the wall of silver a few feet distant.

Daring Dave shifted his position the moment the light became extinguished.

Realizing this, Hope fired three times in rapid succession, each time at a point where he thought the villain might be.

Then he, too, began noiselessly changing his position.

There had been a landslide; in fact, a small avalanche outside, and the entrance to the cave was closed up!

Daring Dave had lost his revolver in the darkness, and Jeff Hope still clutched his, with two cartridges left in it.

The outlaw was endeavoring to find his lost weapon, and Hope was striving to locate the villain so he could fire a shot and finish him.

Not ten feet apart, the men moved about like cats, while the

darkness was so intense that neither could see an inch beyond his nose.

Presently the outlaw's foot pressed a pebble, making a grinding noise.

Crack! Hope's pistol spoke.

The bullet flew dangerously close to his opponent's head, but did not touch him.

Daring Dave picked up the pebble and tossed it a few feet from him.

Again Hope's revolver cracked.

At the flash the outlaw sprang upon him, knife in hand.

But, thud; the butt of the old man's revolver struck him between the eyes.

With a shriek of rage Daring Dave staggered backward, but did not lose his balance.

Jeff Hope drew his knife and made a vicious lunge.

Clash! The knives came together.

What the outcome of the duel in the darkness would have been will never be known.

Both men were suddenly seized by their collars and jerked apart.

Then a light flashed.

Merle and Gates had heard the voices in the Lost Lode and entering the cave had been caught there by the avalanche.

Merle and the Jerseyman appeared. Gates, on learning of the escape of the outlaw, had made straight for Lost Lode, arousing Race and Merle and being joined by McCoy, the ex-outlaw, and had arrived in time to interfere.

They had heard the shooting, but, when they realized that the avalanche had probably buried them alive, they did not leave the passage right away.

They thought more of getting out into the open air once more.

But it did not take them long to become convinced that they could not get out by the way they had come in unless a considerable amount of digging was done.

Then, at the suggestion of Merle, they started toward the depths of the cavern to see what the shooting meant.

The Jerseyman had a bull's-eye lantern, and he used it so it would give them just enough light to proceed.

They came upon the men just as they were about to fight it out with knives.

Of the two men Jeff Hope was the most surprised.

He gazed at Merle and Gates in speechless amazement, as though he had not thought of such a thing as them coming there.

But with Daring Dave it was different. He was quick to think and quick to act.

He knew if he stayed there his life would not be worth a straw.

So with a mighty bound he broke away and ran like a frightened deer into the darkness beyond.

The Jerseyman strove to throw the light from the bull's-eye upon his fleeting form, but he was too late.

"How—how came you here?" gasped Hope, gazing at Gates.

"We came in the same way you did," was the reply.



"Who is that man, Merle?" and the old man laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"He is a friend," was the reply.

"One who can be trusted?"

"Yes."

"It is all right, then," and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"To prove that I am a friend who can be trusted, I will tell you who I am. I am Lemuel Gates."

Merle put out his hand.

"I am glad you are with us, Mr. Gates," said he.

"Misery likes company," replied the Jerseyman, with a laugh, though at the same time he showed signs of uneasiness.

"Misery?" echoed Hope. "Why do you say misery?"

"Because we are buried alive, unless you know of a way to get out different from the place we entered!" exclaimed Merle.

"Yes," added Gates, "it will take twenty men half a day to dig us out. If the air remains pure enough to keep us alive for that time we will be all right."

Jeff Hope began walking up and down excitedly.

"And the worst enemy we have got is in here with us!" he cried.

"We'll look out for him," was the grim retort from Gates.

"He is my meat, I want you to understand!"

"Let us go back to the passage and listen for sounds of the picks. McCoy and Race will soon have a gang there digging us out," Merle suggested.

"No—no!" almost shouted Hope. "We must not leave the wealth that is lying over there! Look! One is yours, Merle, one is Race's and the other is mine!"

He pointed to the three piles of gold, and for the first time the two newcomers saw them.

"What is this?" cried Merle. "Great Scott! Skeletons, as I live!"

"Yes; three skeletons and three piles of gold!"

"And a cave with a lining of silver!" added Lemuel Gates.

The wiry little man became as much excited as his companions. Never in his life had he looked upon so much riches!

The three of them knelt before the golden treasure and began sifting the shining grains through their fingers.

So absorbed did they become that they forgot that they were imprisoned in the underground place—forgot that Daring Dave was in the cavern.

For ten minutes they sat there, estimating upon the worth of the gold which had once belonged to the three ghastly relics lying near them.

"There is enough here to give you a share, Mr. Gates," said Hope. "This cavern alone is worth millions!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DIGGING AWAY THE DIRT.

The excitement the report of Daring Dave's mysterious escape made in Diamond Bar was intense.

As soon as he could calm himself sufficiently to call the vigilantes together, Jim Dacker did so, and he gave the order for the

men to make a thorough search of the mountainside and endeavor to recapture the villain at all hazards.

There was one man among the miners who was probably more interested in getting the outlaw captain back in the toils than any one else, and that was Big Al.

It was not alone for the sake of seeing the notorious desperado hanged—although he was ready to haul on the rope when the word was given—but because the big fellow believed Lemuel Gates to be the most wonderful man alive, and he wanted to see if the remainder of the pack of cards were in the outlaw's pocket.

Big Al had never seen a genuine necromancer perform, and besides, he was very superstitious.

He was pretty well under the influence of the bad liquor sold at the Bar at the time Gates gave his little performance, but he was not muddled so much that he could not appreciate the tricks.

He believed the Jerseyman had really shot the cards into the pockets of the men, and he was anxious to get hold of the pack Gates had whisked through space into the outlaw's pocket.

He thought they would bring him good luck, so he concluded to hunt up Daring Dave on his own hook.

The ignorant fellow examined his revolvers, and while the vigilantes were mounting their horses to start in pursuit, he set out on foot.

"I don't know where ther dare-devil cuss hangs out, but somethin' tells me I'll run across him afore I gits back," he muttered. "I want them cards, an' I'm goin' ter have 'em, if he ain't chucked 'em away. That feller from Jersey are ther smartest man I ever seed, an' I kin be jist as smart if I kin only git hold of them cards."

Just why he got this notion in his head it is impossible to say; but Big Al was a peculiar man, as well as a superstitious and ignorant one.

Up the mountain the fellow went, with no particular destination in view, but with a dogged determination to find Daring Dave.

As luck would have it, his footsteps at length brought him to the gully where the Lost Lode was located.

He walked upon the spot about five minutes after the avalanche had shut Race and McCoy from those in the cavern.

Our young friend from New York immediately recognized the big miner as one of the hangers-on about the saloons of Diamond Bar, and he quickly asked his aid in digging the imprisoned ones out.

"How many are in ther cave?" Big Al asked.

"Four that I know of," answered McCoy, "an' one of 'em is Daring Dave, ther captain of ther mountain gang."

"What!" cried Big Al, dancing with delight; "he's jist the man I'm lookin' fer. I'm a-goin' ter root him out. Whoop!"

Casting a swift glance at the track of the avalanche, the big fellow swung his hat in the air and darted from the spot.

"Is he crazy?" asked Race of his companion.

"Ther Lord only knows, but I think he is," was the answer of McCoy.



redoubled their efforts, and finally an entrance was forced through the dirt wall.

Race sprang to meet his cousin, and the two boys hugged each other with joy.

Jim Decker led the miners in a cheer, and when this had subsided he caught Gates by the arm and exclaimed:

"Where's Daring Dave? They tell me he was in ther cave with you?"

"He's in there yet," was the reply.

"Then we'll fetch him out! Come, boys!"

"You'll need a lantern or two, I reckon," said Hope. "Wait an' I'll git one."

"I will go in again with my lantern, too, and I'll show you where we last saw Daring Dave," spoke up the Jerseyman.

"And I'll stay outside with you, Race," said Merle. "I've a whole lot to tell you about the inside of that cavern."

Jeff Hope soon had his lantern lighted, and then, with Gates at his side, he led the way into the wonderful cave of silver.

Each of them followed a side wall of the underground place, the miners following through the center.

Every one of them held a drawn revolver, and it was quite evident that the moment Daring Dave came to their view a score of bullets would be buried in his body.

The miners were so excited over the prospect of hunting down the outlaw captain that they did not comment upon the glistening silver walls at all. They seemed to have but one purpose in view now, and that was a relentless one.

When a complete circuit of the place had been made those of the men in advance were attracted by a groan.

The next moment Gates discerned the figure of a man lying on the ground.

But it was not Daring Dave!

This he saw when he held his lantern forward and bent over the body.

A cry of astonishment left his lips.

"Why, it's Big Al, ther drunkard!" cried the captain of the vigilantes. "I thought you fellers said Daring Dave was in here?"

"So he was," exclaimed Jeff Hope, looking about him in a puzzled way.

"An' this man was outside with us a few minutes ago," spoke up McCoy, who was one of the party. "He said he had found another way of getting in here, an' when we give him a rope he started up ther hill an' was collared by Daring Dave's band. He got away from them after Race Neville shot one of 'em an' saved us from bein' blowed to ther sky, an' now he is here!"

"It is odd how he got here so soon," observed Gates.

"You are right," exclaimed Jim Decker. "Now, how did he git here, an' where are Daring Dave?"

Big Al would never answer the question, for at that moment he gave a gasp and expired.

The miners bowed their heads reverently when it was announced that he was dead.

Half a dozen ugly stabs in the breast and abdomen showed that he had been in conflict with some one, and Gates made up his mind that it could have been no one else than Daring Dave.

He flashed his lantern about and presently beheld a rope hanging down from above.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "this explains it, I guess. Big Al came in and Daring Dave went out!"

"That's it," nodded McCoy. "Now, we want to go out an' find him. I'll prove to you that I am an honest man at heart, for I am going to bring the villain back to you, dead or alive. I know where he will make for, an' I'll find him in no time."

The reformed outlaw was off the next instant, and as the miners stood there in the dull glare of the lanterns Lemuel Gates told them who and what he was.

"He'll make a man yet, if Daring Dave don't kill him," he said. "Gentlemen, let's carry out what's left of Big Al an' give him a decent burial."

The body was lifted tenderly from the ground, and all hands filed through the cavern and out through the passage.

When they got outside in the light of day Gates noticed something that he had overlooked before.

The right hand of the dead miner clutched a pack of playing cards!

No one could imagine why he died with such things clinched in his fingers, unless it was because he was a confirmed gambler and wished to show that he died as he had lived.

Big Al had found the remainder of the pack of cards, and he died thinking the Jerseyman had placed them in Daring Dave's pocket by magic!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CONCLUSION.

"We'll make one job of it, I guess," observed Jim Decker. "Them outlaws have got ter be cleaned out afore sunset! I've said this afore, but somethin' tells me that it'll come to pass this time."

"I'll lead you right to their hang-out," said Lemuel Gates. "I know where it is; as I joined the band the other day."

A murmur of astonishment went up from the crowd.

"Who are you, anyway?" gasped the captain of the vigilantes. "You beat any man I ever come across."

"I am Lemuel Gates, from the State of New Jersey, and, to be honest with you, gentlemen, I was sent out here by the postal authorities to stop the robberies of the mail. I have found who the guilty parties are. One of them is Daring Dave."

"And the other is my son," added Jeff Hope, in a choky voice.

There was no reply to this, and the old man walked away, the sympathy of every one present going with him.

Merle and Race hesitated about following the vigilantes to the retreat of the outlaws, but made up their minds to go when Jim Decker called out to them:

"Come on! this is ther grand wind-up of rascality in Diamond Bar! You boys may as well be in at ther death."



Jeff Hope shook his head.

"I'll stay here and watch what belongs to us," he said.

The boy partners followed the crowd of determined men along the mountain path.

Lemuel Gates was leading them straight to the retreat of the outlaws, and he carried with him the can of nitro-glycerine that was lying upon the breast of the outlaw Race had shot.

Not the least sign of one of the villains could be seen, but the Jerseyman, or detective, as we shall now call him, was pretty sure they had taken refuge inside.

A few yards from the secret entrance they came upon a startling scene.

Two bodies lay side by side on the ground.

And they were Daring Dave and McCoy!

Both were dead—killed instantly, it seemed, for a bullet hole in the outlaw captain's breast and one in McCoy's forehead told the tale.

Just how it happened no one knew. They could only judge.

"I said that fellow would make a man of himself, if Daring Dave did not kill him," said Gates, shaking his head. "I took a great notion to him, and intended to set him up in business in the East."

"He said he would bring back ther captain, dead or alive, an' he made a big stroke to do it," observed Jim Decker. "Now, then, we'll make them measly coyotes hum! Let her go, Mr. Gates!"

"Let what go?" asked the detective.

"Why, this," and almost before he knew it the man seized the can of explosive from his hand and hurled it at the rocks a few feet away.

They were standing behind a large bowlder at the time, and as quick as a flash every man dropped to the ground.

The next instant a deafening explosion rang out and pieces of rock flew far over their heads.

"You shouldn't have done that!" said Gates, remonstratingly.

"I wanted ter wake ther gang up," was the reply.

"And you might have put some of us to sleep."

"Oh, no! I knew this here bowlder would keep us from gettin' hurt."

The detective saw there was no use in arguing the point, so he led the way to see what damage the explosion had caused.

But just then another surprise took place.

A volley of rifle shots whistled about them, and one of the vigilantes was shot dead.

The nitro-glycerine had destroyed a large portion of the hidden retreat of the outlaws, and rendered desperate the surviving members of the band made an attack upon the miners.

"Now, then, jist mind your eyes an' mow 'em down!" exclaimed Jim Decker, as soon as he recovered himself.

He had scarcely spoken when the men began firing, and the reckless villains dropped like grain before the sickle.

They were foolish enough to expose themselves, and—well, they met their fate.

There is not a great deal more to write, for the excitement and the wild life our heroes had been forced to mingle with was now over.

There was no one to interfere with them in working the Lost Lode, and they got along swimmingly.

At the end of two months they had secured a deed and clear title for their claim, though it cost something like a small fortune to do this.

But, as the money came out of the golden piles found in the silver cavern, this did not matter.

It became the ambition of Race Neville and Merle Baxter to build a city where Diamond Bar stood, and they set about it.

In two years' time they accomplished great things, and they saw that their hopes were to be realized.

Merle's relatives came out there to live, and this made it more pleasant for the young partners.

Jeff Hope worked along in harmony with them, and his daughters became engaged to our young friends—Millie to Race, and Rosy to Merle.

They had never heard from Bill Hope since Lemuel Gates saw him in the outlaws' retreat, and they were quite sure he was alive somewhere, as his body had not been found among those of the outlaws.

The months rolled on, and the time came for a grand double wedding to take place in the hustling city that once was the mining village known as Diamond Bar.

Of course you can imagine who the contracting parties were.

Lemuel Gates came on from the East to be present at the ceremonies, and he brought with him a handsome, bearded stranger.

The man was Bill Hope! He had not been killed with the other outlaws, had repented his wickedness long ago, and had built a name and character for himself in the city of New Orleans.

It is needless to say he was warmly welcomed by his relatives.

Reader, the silver mine known as the Lost Lode still exists, and there is still plenty of silver in it. It has not been worked much in the last few years, though it has made fortunes for those interested in it.

THE END.

Next week's issue will be a corker—a good seasonable story and one especially suitable for the bicycling boy. No. 24 of the BRAVE AND BOLD Library, which will be issued next week, will contain the story entitled "The Bicycle Boys of Blueville; or, Joe Masterson's Unknown Enemies," by Cornelius Shea. This is just the finest time of the year for wheeling, and this story will just put you in the humor for a long spin.

Joe Masterson is a country boy, living in a little New Jersey village, but he knows how to ride a wheel, and in one case wins a race from a professional.

He wins more than this, however, for with the aid of his trusty wheel he races into a fortune.



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